University of Alberta

Keeping Faith:

Christian Education as Tradition and Transformation

©

by

Darlene Gail Eerkes

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

Throughout this study I collected qualitative and quantitative research data in an attempt to discover what makes Edmonton Christian School a *Christian* school. I wanted to understand how this school community perceived and experienced Christian education. Thus my question: "What do parents, teachers and students perceive as features that make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school?" Within this research, I hoped to discover various worldviews and to reflect upon my personal response to issues predominant in Christian education. Ultimately, I wanted to understand the importance of continuing the struggle for Christian education.

Using questionnaires, a rating scale survey and interviews I heard descriptive stories, feelings and personal perceptions from over 400 participants. Upon summarizing, interpreting and analyzing the results, participants stated clearly that, for them, Christian education is: (1) integrating the Christian perspective into life and learning, (2) Christian teachers modeling the faith, (3) a Christian community that learns to live their faith, and (4) a leadership/governance paradigm whose policies and personnel are distinctly Christian in word and action. Undoubtedly, the greatest strength of Christian education at ECS was the perceived integration of the Christian perspective into all of life and learning by Christian teachers who model faith. On the other hand, the ability to live in community in ways that show unity between words and actions appeared to be the greatest challenge.

For me, this study has confirmed that Christian education is about creating and nourishing difference. It is education with a specific intention reflected in goals, curriculum, educational philosophies and a vision of life that claims to place God at the

center of all life. Nevertheless, I was struck by the tension between different Christian views on Christian education evident in the participant responses. To find balance between tradition and transformation is an ongoing dialogue.

Christian education at Edmonton Christian School is a dynamic process. It is the struggle toward the goal of a better practice of God-learning and God-living. It is the desire of a Christian community to keep faith by providing a better Christian education that honours tradition and seeks transformation.

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I owe much thanks to my friends Jim Parsons and Tara Fenwick who initially challenged me to engage in doctoral studies. Their encouragement and assurance that I would be able to pursue my interests resulted in me taking the necessary beginning steps to this end. Throughout this process I have felt their support and Jim's professional insight as my supervisor.

Thank you to the many people who impacted my progress through this research: my committee members who read and advised me in my work, to people whom I have never met but they provided resources, directed me to relevant information and even provided me samples of their own work that informed my study, to people who loaned me their books and shared their ideas and to those computer geniuses whom I depended on to guide me through the marvels of computer technology.

For the community of Edmonton Christian School, I am grateful. Within this school and as part of this community I have matured as a Christian and grown as a Christian educator. Accepted as an "outsider" I have become a member of this Christian community wherein I have developed my views on Christian education through the mentoring of dedicated and reflective Christian educators. I owe much thanks to my colleagues, the parents and community members at this school who struggle together to improve Christian education in this place. Their support and interest in this study has been overwhelmingly positive and affirming. And, ultimately, my ever-inspiring and challenging students make all my work worthwhile as they force me to put my words into actions; I am motivated to walk this Christian journey with the students and I am delighted to have them in my life.

Alas, my husband and daughter have endured my constant busyness and the endless papers and books strewn throughout our house. A special thank you to my husband – I love him and thank him for his endless support in numerous ways. To my brilliant and beautiful daughter – I am rewarded by her editing skills and challenged by her personal ideas as she expresses her faith and her experience, a product of Christian education.

However, none of this would have occurred if it weren't for my parents, my Christian mother and father, who nurtured my faith in God as the centre of all life and learning. From them I learned what it means to love God, to love your neighbour and to honour God's creation. From them I developed the knowing that God loves me, just as I am. They blessed my life with their teachings, their faith and their example.

This research work is much more than a doctoral thesis written to complete a doctoral program; this work is a life-long passion begun as a child – to understand all things and all activities as belonging to God. Thus, in actuality, all my gratitude begins and ends with God, the Alpha and the Omega.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	Meaning/Interpretation
CRC	Christian Reformed Church
ECS	Edmonton Christian School
ESCE	Edmonton Society for Christian Education

CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH

Introduction to the Research

A Story

John eased his van into his driveway, carefully, so that the paint ladders attached to the roof wouldn't hit the overhanging tree branch. It was 9:45 p.m., a typical end to a typical day. After nine hours of painting and wallpapering for a local contractor, John had eaten a quick supper before heading out for his moonlighting jobs. Gathering his lunch pail and records, he climbed the steps to his door. Once inside, he saw his wife, Judy, sitting at the empty kitchen table. John knew that if she was sitting there not doing anything she probably wanted to talk.

"This isn't working, honey," Judy said in her discouraged voice.

"What's not working?" said John, with a quick kiss to her cheek.

"You working nights like this. The kids and I hardly see you. Half the time you're stressed out and exhausted. We can't afford a new car and we never have enough money to go on a family trip, like to Disneyland or something. There's got to be a better way."

"Like what?" John replied. "You know we depend on this income. Without it, we couldn't pay the program fees for the school."

"Well, I'm wondering," said Judy, somewhat hesitantly, "if Christian schooling is really worth it. Do we really need to send the kids to a Christian school?"

"You're kidding," said John. "I'm working night and day like this and you're not even convinced it's worth it?'

"Not if we never see you," said Judy, warming to her side of the debate. "What's more important, the kids getting a Christian education or the kids spending some time with their father?"

"Judy, we've been through this before. The public schools aren't very safe. There are all kinds of lousy influences on the kids there." He settled into a chair and searched under the newspaper for the remote control.

"Beverly sends her kids to the public school, since Nick left her, and she says the place is fine. The teachers care. There aren't any big problems with drugs and stuff. And you know that just because our kids are in the Christian school doesn't mean that they never encounter drugs. You know what Mark told us about that party he went to last weekend at his friend's house. There were drugs there and lots of drinking. Going to the Christian school doesn't necessarily protect our kids from these influences. And, Shalen said that the kids are sometimes mean to the new girl in her class. Kris's work habits have slacked off a bit now that she is interested in boys. So, what difference does it really make if they attend a Christian or public school?"

John shook his head. "Isn't Christian education more than a just a safe school or a school that has less drugs or no drugs? Just because the kids are not always nice to each other or sometimes do wrong things and aren't motivated the way we would like them to be, does this mean that they are not getting a Christian education?" he asked, clicking the remote to get the evening news. "In a Christian school parents get to determine what values get taught. Isn't the curriculum taught from a Christian perspective, not just from the values of the public school office or some textbook publisher?"

"What about the family?" said Judy, sensing that she wasn't making progress.

"I'll make more of an effort," said John, ending the discussion and getting absorbed in the newscast once again.

Judy sighed. "Well, I'm getting ready for bed." She held up a light green sheet of paper. "By the way, the school newsletter came today. We are expected to contribute to the Society auction. We need to raise more money for the school. The school is considering an expansion program.

As John sat in front of the television, his mind began to wander. Why did they send their kids to a Christian school? In one sense, he had never given it much thought. As children, he and Judy had attended a Christian school. He had always just expected that when their children were old enough, they, too, would go to a Christian school. Of course, there were some obvious differences now. When he and Judy attended Christian schools the schools were independent schools and their parents had paid the full tuition, about three times what they pay now, with only a little government funding for their education. Recently the Christian school had joined the public school as an alternative school. There were still program fees because the Society still owned the building, provided their own transportation and covered the cost of the alternative Christian education status by paying for the Bible classes. However, the cost of Christian schooling was much less than in the past.

John thought about what Judy had said. "Is it mainly for safety's sake that we made that choice? Of course, I want the best for my kids. I want them to have strong moral values and be able to get good jobs. I want them to know that God is important in everything they do. But, I'm just not sure anymore. What is Christian education really all about? Is Edmonton Christian School (ECS) really providing a Christian education? What does it mean to have a Christian school? It takes such an incredible toll on me and my family. If we didn't have these program fees we could buy a new car and maybe go on a family trip to Europe. Is Beverly right -- are caring teachers and a safe environment enough?"

Picking up the newsletter, John got up and went to the kitchen to get himself a juice. Coupon drives, band nights, sports teams, service projects, a society auction -- what else was happening at the school? What do I really know about the curriculum? How different is it from what happens in public schools? How do Christian teachers teach differently, or do they? Are the kids going to be any different as adults because they attended a Christian school, than they would be if they attended a public school? What do I really want from the school anyway? What makes ECS a Christian school?[1]

The Historical Context of Edmonton Christian School

Dutch immigrant families who emigrated from Holland mostly in the 1940s and 1950s wished to continue the tradition of Christian education in Canada. On August 2, 1945, a meeting was called in Edmonton to consider the formation of a Christian school. There were 34 people present at this first meeting to elect a school board and begin making plans for a future school. The Edmonton Christian School Society was founded (Wiersma, 1960).

---

[1] Much of this story is taken from Stronks & Blomberg (1993). Some situations have been changed and ideas added to make the story fit the context of Edmonton Christian School. This revised scenario, although fictional in nature, is real to the issues and the nature of many discussions surrounding Christian education as it relates to education at Edmonton Christian School.

The first school eventually opened in September 1949 with 20 students in a single room in the basement of First Christian Reformed Church. A two-room school building was begun and in September 1951 Central School was opened. Almost immediately the student population increased and the school became a three-room school (Wiersma, 1960). Over the years one school eventually became three campuses. The population, over 800 in the year 2000, expanded to include a greater variety of students from other cultures, ethnic groups and Christian backgrounds. The Edmonton Christian School Society has grown rapidly.

The fundamental, underlying raison d'être for the parents and school members in the Edmonton Christian School Society was to have students educated and nurtured in a Christian perspective, while using the Alberta curriculum and meeting all other provincial teaching and education requirements. The establishment of this school followed the opening of many other Calvinist schools, initiated across Canada and the United States. "Calvinist" is used here to refer to the followers of John Calvin, a man influential in the spread of Protestantism to many countries throughout Europe in the 16th century. According to Oppewal and DeBoer (Carper, 1984) this term is used to distinguish these schools and this perspective from such other Christian schools as Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and other Protestant denominations or independent church-based educational institutions (p. 58). However, Calvinism has many branches and different perspectives. Although the Christian Reformed Church members were instrumental in starting the Christian school, eventually the school and church separated. This led to the formation of parentally controlled schools, rather than church controlled schools. A close relationship remained between the school and the church that led to a definite impression that these were denominational schools. In principle, that was not the intent (p. 66).

These Christians believed strongly that their children should be educated in a Christian school. It seemed important that teachers share the same values as parents in the home. Vander Spruit (1999) quotes Terpstra, "Schools need to be extensions of Christian homes" (p. 19). These parents were committed to establishing and paying for

Christian schooling in order to carry on the faith practices of the family and church community. Formed to provide a framework of love, support and discipline, these schools would be run by educators intent on directing the students into appropriate behaviours that were measured against Christian principles. Vander Spruit quotes Van Dijk in describing the framework of these Christian schools established within,

> the socio-cultural world view which placed a great deal of emphasis on man's calling in serving God in all areas of life. God's Word and Law were to be normative for their actions…. The Calvinists established Christian schools at all levels…. They did not want a completely separate community…. They make a distinction between living in the world, but not being of the world; integrating, but not accepting society's value system. The separate institutions are not built to perpetuate the Dutch ethnic culture, and Calvinists make every effort to have individuals of other ethnic and faith communities join them in these ventures. (p. 19)

As a private, independent school, this school system did not receive total government support. Some government funding was provided but parents and other community members contributed huge amounts of money to fulfill their dreams. The Society members, truly, put their money where their mouth was. Tuition was paid and sacrifices were required so these schools could continue to operate.

In 1999 great changes occurred; the society moved in a new direction from its conception 50 years ago. In a landmark change, in September 1999, the Edmonton Society for Christian Education became an alternative Christian school within Edmonton Public School. The underlying commitment, however, remained the same. Members of this Christian education society desired to continue living out their Christian worldview in the area of education.

Since becoming employed as a teacher by the Edmonton Society for Christian Education over 15 years ago, I have been interested in these discussions. I was on the committee for re-writing the vision statement that became the foundational document in distinguishing this school as an alternative Christian school within Edmonton Public School. Clearly, members of this education society believe there are significant worldview differences. They believe that the existence of a separate school is required to educate children in this alternative, Christian perspective.

Theoretical Framework of the Researcher

Researcher's Story

Just before my father passed away quite suddenly in August 1991, I had committed myself to finding him the music for "The Tree Song," written by Ken Medema (1978). My dad was an avid guitar player, especially enjoying gospel music. I often remember his humming and strumming new tunes. While visiting my parents immediately preceding my father's death, I had taught my dad this new song which I had learned while teaching at Edmonton Christian school. We had discussed the symbolism inherent in the words of the song and he wanted the music to the song so that he could teach it at his church.

The Tree Song

I saw a tree by the riverside one day as I walked along,
Straight as an arrow and pointing to the sky, growing tall and strong
How do you grow so tall and strong I said to the riverside tree?
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me:

Chorus: I've got roots growing down to the water,
I've got leaves growing up to the sunshine,
and the fruit that I bear is a sign of the life in me.
I am shade from the hot summer sundown,
I am nest for the birds of the heaven.
I'm becoming what the Lord of trees has meant me to be,
A strong, young tree.

I saw a tree in the wintertime when snow lay on the ground,
Straight as an arrow and pointing to the sky and winter winds
blew all around.
How do you stay so tall and strong I said to the wintertime tree?
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me: (Chorus)

I saw a tree in the city streets where buildings blocked the sun,
green and lovely I could see it gave joy to everyone.
How do you grow in the city streets I said to the downtown tree?
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me: (Chorus)

In many ways the basic tenets of this song represent the formation and foundation of my life. Born into a fundamentalist family, I was immersed from infancy in a

Christian way of looking at the world. In words and actions, my parents taught the fundamental principles and values of the Christian faith.

Throughout my formative years I was constantly exposed to Bible stories and songs orienting me toward the Christian faith. As a young child, I was absorbed in our church, attending services and becoming involved in numerous activities with my family. My positive, enjoyable childhood memories revolved around faith experiences and activities. Whether it was Sunday school, mid-week children's activities or youth programs, I was first a participant and eventually a leader. I was immersed in this church life, growing in my Christian faith and interpreting the world within this specific context.

Until my late teens my family attended church only Sunday mornings. There were two services on Sunday but we lived far away and my parents couldn't afford the gas to make the extra trip on Sunday night. However, when we were not in church we always had our own lively and memorable family sing-a-long at home. All of us sang and gathered around the piano and drums. My dad played the guitar and we would sing to our hearts' content every gospel song and chorus we could remember. Finally, when it was past our normal bedtime, we'd drag ourselves off to bed and wish for next Sunday to come quickly.

For, on Monday when I left for school on the bus, I entered another world – the world of school. My siblings and I attended the local public school in a nearby town. There was nothing wrong with this school, as schools go. The teachers, I'm sure, were caring, friendly and good educators. The problem is, I just don't remember much; my memory is blank. School was a different world. There was no talk about God or what I would call meaningful, heartfelt "life important" things. If you did speak of God you were considered strange, a religious fanatic or "being a witness." I had to be in school, but it seemed to have no relevance to my life. I sought out school friends who had similar beliefs. As Christians, we sometimes talked about God and attempted, consciously, to live by Christian principles and values. Attending the public high school was only a highlight when an Inter-Varsity Christian group was formed. Here, I again took a leadership role and those are good memories. My Christian friends, although of many different denominations and backgrounds, were my school community. I remember very little else about my school days. And, every night I went home to my other world.

I remember my mom praying for us each morning. She would touch each of us as she said our name; she prayed for God's protection on our life that day. At night as we were tucked into bed, Dad would pray for us. He thanked God for the day and then we would say an old unison prayer:

> Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
> If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.

I lived in two worlds. The most attractive world was the place where my religious faith was important and God was the centre of my life. The other, less desirable place, was the world where my faith was not spoken. If lived in action, it usually needed to be silent in words.

Only much later did I realize how split my life was as a child. When I finally attended Bible College I decided that I would pursue a vocation that involved a daily, active demonstration and commitment to my faith. Therefore, when I entered the field of teaching I was struck with a dilemma. To teach in a public school was to return to the days of my childhood, where I would live in a split world. So, I checked out the underpaid, poor teaching conditions in Christian schools and made my decision. I preferred to keep my life united; I would teach in Christian schools so that in my work, as much as possible, I would be able to live out my personal faith in words and actions.

Over time, I discovered that there are a wide range of Christian perspectives and many different approaches taken by Christian educators in Christian schools. The first two Christian schools that I taught in were more focussed on the belief that as Christians we are "in the world, but separate from the world." According to Niebuhr (1975) this orientation is generally defined as "Christ against culture" or in Webber (1979) it is defined as the "separation" model. Although my early faith life and experiences are probably most closely identified in the "Christ against culture" orientation or the "separation" model, I was changing.

After leaving my family home and living in various places across Canada, my exposure to people of different faiths and cultures cultivated in me greater tolerance and acceptance of diversity in religious beliefs. I soon found my personal perspective was more deeply oriented toward a different expression of the Christian faith than that of my parents and childhood church. Eventually, my travels brought me to Edmonton and to Edmonton Christian School; within this educational context my work and beliefs found a greater compatibility. Truly, I had the freedom to express and live by my personal Christian perspective. At Edmonton Christian School I found many people with similar educational, Christian views.

Researcher's Situation

Although I have the propensity to understand and appreciate the Christian belief systems of the previous schools I taught in, I am more closely connected to the belief system operating at Edmonton Christian School. This Christian school is probably most closely identified with the "transformational" model of Christian education, as defined by Niebuhr (1975). To be most closely identified with the transformational model, however, does not imply that the other models are wrong or unacceptable belief systems for Christian schools. My worldview includes elements of all the Christian worldviews mentioned in Niebuhr, 1975 (see also Givens, 1997; Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Webber, 1979; and Zylstra, 1961).

According to Webber (1979) Christians exhibit characteristics identified with most of the models of Christian belief at various times and in various places (p. 195). Givens (1997) suggests that the debate about Christ and the example Jesus set for dealing with culture will always continue among Christians. For, within the hidden depths of the individual conscience this tension is not a struggle of belief with unbelief but is the wrestling and reconciliation of faith with faith (p. 231). To identify my personal worldview as more closely oriented toward one community of Christian faith is only to help situate my own perspective, not to negate the others.

Having taught in quite different types of Christian schools, my own perspective, I believe, is most in tune with the philosophical and theological view of Edmonton Christian School. I am presently an "insider" to this community, having taught here and built relationships for the past 15 years. However, I am also an "outsider." I come from another system of Christian teaching that is distinctly different. My current research is situated within a culture with which I am already familiar and a part, but I bring into this context a different background and the experience of other Christian perspectives. In some aspects this proposed research is a "situated response" (Hermes, 1998). In general, I know the students, teachers, parents and the broader, supporting community at this Christian School. From experience, I can tentatively situate Edmonton Christian School within a Christian worldview while attempting to describe and comprehend individual and collective ideas or beliefs concerning what makes this school a Christian school.

Definition of Terms

Jesus Christ

Varying images and pictures are conjured up with the use of the word "Christ." Most often this reference is to the person of Jesus Christ who lived, died and was resurrected as the foundation and cornerstone of the Christian faith. However, the meaning and importance of Christ's presence in the world is far greater than our cursory glance would suggest.

The early New Testament community understood Jesus Christ in many ways. As Christ, the Messiah, he was the anointed one, promised in the Old Testament to be "the fulfillment of the dreams and hopes of Israel, the very presence of God in their midst" (Webber, 1979, p. 14). The New Testament writers accentuated different truths about Jesus or various aspects of His personality by giving specific designations to Christ. Matthew stressed, "Christ is King." Paul advocated "the grace of Christ." John spoke of "the love of Christ" and Peter affirmed, "the hope we have because of Christ." These New Testament images carried over into the early Christian church (Webber, pp. 14, 15).

Throughout history, until modern times, it has remained difficult to find a term that captures all the images descriptive of this Jesus Christ. Webber (1979) suggests that "Christ" is "the cosmic Christ," the pre-existent Christ as the One who has always existed as a part of God. This Christ is also the Creator, who is the Designer of the universe. As Jesus Christ, He is the Son of God who is the Divine One become flesh. As Redeemer, this Christ is our Saviour to free us from bondage and bring us to eternal life. And, finally Jesus is Lord who is the ultimate ruler of all things. This is the Christ of orthodox Christianity, related to all things because of creation and redemption (pp. 15, 16). Defining or emphasizing some aspect of Christ gives way to the various Christian perspectives that eventually shape a Christian worldview.

Christian

Basically, a Christian is a person who follows Christ. This is one who identifies religious faith as founded in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Nevertheless, to say one is a Christian is to still be unclear as to the religious beliefs of the individual. Smith (1978) claims that people will define their affiliation with a certain church and with a certain religious group or belief based on their own experience, just as scientists, anthropologist, psychologists and sociologists will define their beliefs according to their interests (p. 50). This is true of the attempt to identify a Christian.

There is a vast range of possibilities. A *Christian* may be one of many denominations such as Baptist, Catholic or Presbyterian, just to name a few. To truly realize the meaning of the label, one must identify the worldview of the believer. Even so, within this identification there are many variations because every individual differs somewhat from the next person's belief and is unique in their experience.

Religious Education

Many theologians admit that the effort to define religion is fraught with various limitations in language. This restriction is due to the inability to state comprehensively and say exactly what we mean. Polanyi (1967) declares that "We can know more than we can tell" (p. 4) and Groome (1980) suggests, "Language is always inadequate and thus can always be improved upon" (p. 28). However religion may simply be defined as, "The human quest for the transcendent in which one's relationship with an ultimate ground of being is brought to consciousness and somehow given expression" (p. 22). In the case of religion, language is very often inadequate.

These difficulties are no less true when attempting to define religious education. The act or process of education seems to be a common goal amongst all societies. Also, true educators seek to provide quality education. According to Groome, "Religious educators share with other educators a common responsibility for the quality of all education taking place in our society" (p. 23). This concern for quality education is not limited to a specific community or a certain type of education, but is related to the concern for quality education in the broader community as well.

When referring to "religious education" the word "religious" becomes the adjective to describe the type of education. Thus, "religious educational activity is a deliberate attending to the transcendent dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression" (Groome, 1980, p. 22). Any activity, therefore, that seeks to empower people in the search for the ultimate ground of being, regardless of the tradition, is considered religious education. Religious education seeks to provide an education that is distinctive in nature.

Despite shared concerns for quality education, religious educators educate within a specific tradition. Because this religious education is carried out within a particular community of faith, with a particular view of the world, that community's faith traditions will make the religious education more specific. Within the field of religious education there are numerous traditions within which educators pursue the transcendent and express their relationship with God, the ground of being. Groome (1980) suggests, "When in practice, however, a community educates out of a particular tradition of religious faith, that tradition and community will alter the educational dynamic in both its process and its content" (p. 23). This gives rise to the concept of difference in religious education.

Christian Education

It is important to recognize that the term "religious education" is a broad designation for an educational activity. Identifying a particular religious education may be dependent on recognizing specific religious traditions. Or, it may be the way in which certain groups of people express their relationship to God and each other (Groome, 1980, p. 25). Within the Christian context, education would be expressed as Christian education. This distinguishes it from Jewish education or Buddhist education.

In practice *Christian education* may initially seem to be a negative term depending on one's previous exposure to some forms of Christian education. "Christian" refers to many denominations; each one is different from the other. However, Groome (1980) challenges, "The Christian church should be sufficiently at one to at least permit our educational efforts to be named by the generic term Christian religious education" (p. 24). Within the field of Christian religious education, members of this community need to be informed by theology and scripture. Called to be a universal church, Christians, although different from each other, should be one in spirit.

Culture

Often the popular understanding of culture and religion is to understand religious convictions as the expressions of cultural norms. A broad definition of culture, according to Webber (1979), is "the total pattern of human behavior and its products embodied in thought, speech, action, and artifacts and dependent upon [human] capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language and systems of abstract thought" (p. 18).

However, in the religious context of Christian education, *culture* is more specifically defined as the activity of people, arising out of the created order in which there are inherent values and religious convictions about life. Culture is what people do to manipulate life to their own purposes whereby social organizations, such as government and schools, are created. The formation of culture takes shape within a particular society; it becomes an original creation. Although culture is an activity engaged in by people it can only be expressed in the context of the already created order and it is ultimately dependent upon God who created this world in the beginning (Webber, 1979, p. 18).

Niebuhr (1975) claims that, in the world, "culture is the artificial second environment superimposed on the natural consisting of language, habits, ideals, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes and values" (p. 32). Webber (1979) explains this best by considering language as a cultural creation of people. He says, "Languages are numerous, and each living language develops and changes. But language itself, the ability to speak, is not something that [humans] developed or invented. Rather, language is a gift, a part of God's creative act. God made [people] in such a way that language is intrinsic to what he is" (p. 18). Therefore, people were intended to communicate, and language became and has become the developed activity that people use as a means to fulfill God's creative purpose in culture.

Christian Worldviews

A worldview is a framework or a model to which people adhere. Walsh and Middleton (1984) suggest that a worldview is a person's "way of thinking about life and the world, coupled with the values they set for themselves in the context of that way of thinking" (p. 10). Webber (1979) claims that the word "model" is framed from the Latin word "modus," meaning "measure." To say that one has a "Christian worldview" is to open the door to numerous interpretations, since there are a variety of worldviews with unique distinctions. The underlying essence of some worldviews may be labeled "Christian" but there are many patterns or shapes, differences and similarities. For my purposes, models of Christian education are ways or means by which Christians shape their beliefs, live in the world and against which they measure their pattern of being Christian (p. 19).

Throughout history there have been many types of Christians. Many of them have had a specific commitment to Christ and hold a unique attitude toward culture. Although they may be called *Christian,* their way of living in the world is indicative of their values and how they understand their respective relationship to Christ and the culture of their times. Various writers, educators and theologians propose models of different worldviews (Niebuhr, 1975; see also Givens, 1997; Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Webber, 1979; Zylstra, 1961). All models attempt to deal with how a specific group of Christians most accurately reflect Christ and engage in cultural activity that is a part of the already created order under God. And, although each group of Christians believes their particular understanding and subsequent lifestyle is the correct one, I would suggest that none is perfect. As humans, we are all flawed. However, we are called to do our best to fulfill God's call, to follow as best we understand and are able.

The Study

The Edmonton Society for Christian Education (ESCE)

Brochures produced by the Edmonton Society for Christian education (2000) inform parents and community about the historical and current goals of this Christian society. Founded in 1949 by committed parents, the Society for Christian Education (ESCE) founded Edmonton Christian School (ECS) to educate students "in the Lord." In 1999, ESCS entered into a unique partnership with the Edmonton Public School Board to operate the three campuses of Edmonton Christian School as an alternative program within Edmonton Public School. In this partnership, the ESCE works to protect the heritage of Christian Education by:

(1) Developing Christian curriculum and integrating a complete Christian perspective into the Alberta curriculum.

(2) Ensuring that Christian teachers and administration are employed in Edmonton Christian School.

(3) Providing on-going staff development to ensure that our teachers are empowered to teach from a Christian perspective.

(4) Monitoring classrooms to ensure that the Christian curriculum is being taught effectively.

As an alternative school, ESCE contributes about 20% of the annual budget of Edmonton Christian School to implement and support Christian programs; this contribution is primarily funded by the program fees paid by parents. Kindergarten fees are approximately $240 per child. Fees for students in grades 1 – 12 range from approximately $1400 to $2000 depending on the number of children and whether they are in attendance at the high school; high school fees are higher to match increased rates incurred in the cost of educating high school students.

ESCE consists of 1800 members, an active Board of Directors, sixteen committees, an Executive Director, supporting office staff, bus drivers, maintenance personnel and over 500 volunteers. The Edmonton Christian Society for Christian education owns and maintains the school building and facilities; Society members are also responsible for any expansion costs that might be incurred. Building up-keep and expansion costs are funded by membership dues, on-going donations and fundraising activities of the Society. As well, ESCE owns and maintains an independent bus transportation fleet. Bus costs are subsidized by ESCE to assist over 300 students who are transported to Edmonton Christian School from rural and municipal locations.

As of 2001 Edmonton Christian School was composed of three campuses located in the city of Edmonton, Alberta. The total student population was approximately 1000 students from K – 12. The Northeast campus houses K – 9 students located in the northeast end of Edmonton and educating about one-third of the total student population. This campus is located on the edge of an industrial area; a major highway borders the school. The West campus, located in west Edmonton, educates about 450 students from K – 9. And, finally, the senior high campus, with approximately 250 students, is located about a half-minute walk from the West campus. These two campuses are located in the McQueen residential area where many Edmonton Christian School families have bought homes in order to be close to the school. Each campus of Edmonton Christian School has a library, computer room, kitchen, staff room and work area, gymnasium and playground/sports area. There is a centralized Teacher Resource Centre at the West campus whereby teachers access and share classroom resources such as novel sets, videos and other educational kits. Besides regular classrooms, some combination grades and double classes, there are resource rooms and resource programs operating in each building. Each campus has wheel-chair accessible facilities and these are used by some of the students with special needs.

ESCE facilitates the continued relationship between school, church, parents and other Christian school supporters. As a Society, members strive to maintain long-standing memberships in Christian Schools International and the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta. As an alternative program of Edmonton Public School, Edmonton Christian School offers an opportunity for parents and families to educate children in the Christian perspective. A brochure produced by the school claims, "Surrounded by the supportive hands of community and the upholding hands of God, children at Edmonton Christian School are enabled to explore their unique gifts, invited to be all God intends them to be and freed for joyful service." By sending children to a school that attempts to integrate the Christian faith with learning, Christian parents are taking their God-given responsibility to heart.

The community of Edmonton Christian School is comprised of many enthusiastic, committed supporters who have been involved with Christian education for many years. Some Society members are second and third generation supporters of Christian education. The parent population surrounding the Northeast campus includes many people employed in blue-collar jobs. Numerous parents are involved in the trades; there are carpenters, electricians, plumbers, farmers and many other labourers. The West campus parent population is comprised of a greater number of higher-income families with more professional jobs and self-employed trades. These might include more doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, and self-employed trades people engaged in relatively successful private businesses.

At times, the differences between the campuses are more obvious. This is not only in the wealth difference, due to the income levels of the families, but even within the area of Christian faith and belief. Many members of the ESCE are also contributing members of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The Northeast parent population tend to be members of more conservative Christian Reformed Churches, whereas the West parent population is somewhat less conservative in their approach to life and religious beliefs.

Edmonton Christian School has approximately 55 teachers with over 15 teacher assistants, student aides and resource helpers. Many of the early teachers at the school were of the Reformed tradition, mainly attending Christian Reformed Churches. However, this has slowly been changing as more teachers are joining the staff whose religious affiliation is not Christian Reformed. The northeast campus has a wide diversity of teachers from many different Christian churches. However, the west campus and senior high campus continue to have more teachers affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church. But, in spite of their denominational affiliation, it is the job of these Christian staff members to uphold the vision and mission of Edmonton Christian School --to help students see God in science, math, literature, art, geography and physical education. Besides living a Christian life-style, Christian teachers are expected to teach and model the Christian life with their students on a daily basis.

Curriculum development at Edmonton Christian School is a high priority as staff members use a mix of innovative approaches to build a distinctive Christian curriculum that brings academics to life. The teachers work together to build a distinctive curriculum that exceeds Alberta standards while weaving faith in God into all aspects of life and learning. Knowing that the world belongs to God and believing that Jesus died to save the world and its people propels staff members to equip children for joyful service. It is the intent that graduates be equipped to lead as confident, committed, caring people who make a Christian difference in the community. Academics, service projects and practical training attempt to teach students to model Christ.

Besides weaving Biblical concepts into all classroom activities, teachers have designated times for devotions, songs and prayer. Each class usually begins the day with approximately 10 minutes of devotion time led by teachers and students. These may be in the form of scriptural readings, stories from special devotional books or discussions of events that have occurred in the life of the students and the world around them. An event like the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11 would be a major topic of discussion for several days as teachers and students pray for and with suffering people around the world. Bible classes occur several times during the week as intensive study periods engage the students in a prescribed Bible curriculum program that encourages students to reflect and apply Biblical principles to their daily life. Whole school assemblies are held for about 40 minutes, celebrating the major Christian days in the year such as Christmas and Easter; parents and community members are invited to attend. Divisional assemblies are held at least every couple of weeks where a devotional focus allows students, classes and teachers to worship and learn together. Prayer time may occur at various times throughout the day, depending on the occasion; usually prayer in the morning, at lunch and the end of the day are part of the routine. Bulletin boards in classrooms and hallways are usually filled with student work, projects and current activities with Scripture verses or phrases that turn our learning back to God's presence permeating our lives.

Classrooms are places of activity and learning. Students learn in a variety of ways as various learning styles are encouraged and developed. While loving and respecting each student's opinion, a visitor to the school might see students engaged in whole class discussions around an issue of justice. In another class individuals may be receiving direct instruction from volunteers, a resource teacher or the regular homeroom teacher. Hands-on learning centers may be the order of the day with children experimenting with levers and pulleys. Group activities or individual quiet times might give evidence to the delight students have in their favourite book or quiet time activities. Public speaking opportunities arise often with memorization and recitation, the sharing of assignments and the presentation of work done on projects. Reflective and learning journals may occupy some students before they again enjoy drama, music, sports or other creative fine arts programs. In junior and senior high, students may choose options courses such as woodworking, food studies, art, band, drama, first aid, computer technology and more. Both parents and staff donate countless hours to ensure a rich education that includes arts, drama, music, technology, life skills, reading partners, sports and field trips. All of this is done in a community that attempts to honour God as the author of mystery and wonder.

A walk through the halls at Edmonton Christian School would reveal teachers and students interacting. Whether teachers are on recess or noon duty in the gym, supervising hallways or outside activities or simply in their classrooms setting up for the next class, you will see students gathered. Many times students are walking and talking with their teachers, laughing and joking or discussing some project or assignment. Students stream throughout the school socializing with friends. While most elementary students are outside at noon and recess times, many of the junior and senior high students enjoy noon gatherings in the foyer, gym or outside. On the other hand, some of the students prefer the quiet of the library to read or work on homework and others complete assignments on the computer. As in all relationships, you may sometimes see tears and frustration while students recognize brokenness in their relationships with their friends. Seeking out teachers, many students receive the help, counsel, encouragement or support they need. Together, teachers and students strive to resolve conflicts, negotiate forgiveness and realize God's help even in their social struggles. Occasionally fights erupt and students must be called to realize anew the effects of brokenness on all of us.

At first glimpse into Edmonton Christian School the casual observer might see a school and a school community that appears to operate like any other school. One might note Scripture verses on the walls or in the hallway and a mission statement located in a prominent place that declares: "Believing Jesus is Lord over all of life Edmonton Christian School educates students for joyful and responsible service to God and society" (see Appendix A: Mission Statement). However, upon a more careful observation and possible conversation with students, teachers or parent community members, it would be hoped that there would be an awareness that education in this place is of a distinctive nature. Hopefully professional teaching would be apparent, healthy interaction would be noticeable and positive relationships would be obvious, not just because these are the right things for humans to do but because of who we are and to whom we belong. Recognizing God as Creator and Lord of all life, members of Edmonton Christian School, therefore, attempt to live and act in ways that honour God. The result is not only to love and serve God, but to love and serve others because we belong to God and desire to image God in all of life. This is the distinctiveness of Christian education as advocated by the members of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education.

Significance

Over the past few years Edmonton Christian School has undergone a number of significant changes. The elected Edmonton Christian School Board members, who are parents, have been actively involved in re-structuring the school. A main focus from 1998 to 1999 was to re-evaluate the mission statement and renew the vision statement. According to Hollaar (1991), it is important to keep mission and vision statements up to date,

> One must check the map regularly to see if one is still on course or to see if the map is still current, supported by the latest reliable information. This map provides direction and informs the development of curriculum materials such as course and unit outlines. It implies pedagogy, the how of teaching. It suggests ways of evaluating classroom and school practices and policies. It suggests appropriate governance models and practices. It suggests appropriate leadership styles. (p. 3)

In fact, a school vision statement should determine the direction and focus of the school activities. It is situated within the framework for the worldview and it is the perspective that shapes and guides its followers toward a specific orientation (Walsh, 1984). Toward this end, Edmonton Christian School updated and revised its vision statement.

Throughout this re-visioning process, many legitimate questions were raised. Second and third generation parents asked, "What makes Edmonton Christian School different? How are we a Christian school? What is Christian education?" New parents to the school asked, "Why does Edmonton Christian School have a separate, or alternative school? What does it mean to have a Christian school? What makes Edmonton Christian School a Christian school?" These questions continue to be important and need to be re-addressed from time to time.

Also, during 1998 and 1999, the members of the Edmonton Christian School Society made a momentous decision when they voted to become an alternative Christian school within the Edmonton Public School Board. After 50 years as an independent school, on September 1, 1999, the Edmonton Christian School Board gave up its status as a private school. The Edmonton Public School Board became the employer and officiating Board to have jurisdiction over Edmonton Christian School. At the same time, the Public School Board members agreed to respect the Society's theological approach to Christian education. The public board ratified the Christian perspective on education and accepted the alternative status of Edmonton Christian School as a Christian school.

Throughout these processes of re-evaluating the mission statement, renewing the vision statement and joining Edmonton Public School as an alternative school, many questions were raised. Edmonton Public School personnel inquired about the claim to Christian education distinctiveness. They wanted to know, "What makes you a Christian school?" Negotiators wanted to know, "How is Edmonton Christian School different from a public school? How do you teach differently? What is Christian education? And, how is the school unique so that an alternative school status can be appropriated?" Thus, similar important questions were once again before the members of the Edmonton Christian School society. It became incumbent on members of this society to affirm and clarify why and how the school was different.

Finally, for me personally, this is an area of interest. After years spent as a Christian educator within three different types of Christian school, I am interested in exploring questions concerning Christian education. Having committed many years to Christian education as a teacher and a parent, I value Christian education. At the same time I wonder what other parents and other teachers perceive about Christian teaching. Being aware of other Christian school perspectives and, yet, identifying myself mostly with the worldview of Edmonton Christian School, I am specifically interested in the perceptions about Christian education within this school system. I, too, have pondered the numerous questions already asked.

To answer our own membership in the Edmonton Christian School Society and to give an accurate account to Edmonton Public School personnel, it is essential that Edmonton Christian School (ECS) members re-evaluate and re-define our Christian school status. Our existence as an alternative Christian school within Edmonton Public depends on our ability to describe and give evidence to the fact that this school provides a Christian perspective in educating students. My response to these questions becomes important, not only for personal reasons, but for the members of the Edmonton Christian School Society and for the members of the Edmonton Public School Board.

Purpose

Specifically, the purpose of this case study was to explore what some community members think and believe is Christian about the education that children receive by attending Edmonton Christian School. I wanted to determine what features of the school make education at this school "Christian" in nature, as defined by parents, teaching staff and older students. I wanted to attempt to understand how these groups experience Edmonton Christian School as a Christian school. I hoped to determine their perceptions and feelings of how this school is oriented toward a Christian worldview and perspective in the education that occurs within the school. As an alternative Christian School within the Edmonton Public School, it was vital that parents, staff and students at Edmonton Christian School be able to conceptualize and verbalize what makes this school a Christian School.

I believed this project to be timely and relevant for the Edmonton Christian School community, the members of the Edmonton Public School Board and for me personally. The administration and some present school board members at Edmonton Christian School were aware of my questions and the answers I sought in this research project. As parents and staff we say and believe we are providing a Christian education, but are these realities in the experience of most of the families? Thus, the question: "What do parents, teachers and students perceive as features that make Edmonton Christian School a Christian School?"

It was imperative that my research be grounded within the school community so that the research would inform this community. I desired that this study provide a source of knowledge regarding Christian education at Edmonton Christian School to both the Edmonton Christian School Board and the Edmonton Public School board. I hoped that this information would trigger growth, both for my own practice and for members of this Christian school community. My personal interest was to understand how specific individuals perceived "Christian" education within this context, so that I might reflect on how my own teaching and practices are "Christian" in nature. Ultimately, I expect these findings to improve the practice of Christian education and contribute to future decisions and directions for this community.

Research Questions

In order to define our existence as an alternative Christian school within Edmonton Public School it was important to ask the question: "What do parents, teachers and students perceive as features that make ECS a Christian School?" At the same time, several exploratory questions guided the research:

(1) What is Christian education? What are the various models of Christian education and how does a Christian perspective get translated into educational practice?

(2) What criteria could be used to evaluate the Christian distinctiveness of a Christian school? How does faith get integrated into education or is it simply Bible classes that make the distinctiveness? What about academics, relationships and the atmosphere in a school; are these different in a Christian school?

(3) What does it mean to be a Christian teacher or to teach Christianly? Do we have Christian teachers or teachers who are just (or simply) Christians?

(4) Based on the perceptions of the parents, teachers and students, does Edmonton Christian School educate toward a Christian worldview? Are the parents, teachers and students able to articulate a Christian worldview? Is the Christian perspective adopted by Edmonton Christian School the foundational worldview of most of the parents? What are the features of Christian distinctiveness at Edmonton Christian School as defined by parents, teachers and students?

My research concentrated on determining how parents, teachers and students perceived the experience of Christian education at Edmonton Christian School. Initially I focused in the areas of faith integration, academics, teacher lifestyle and practice, and the relationships between staff and students. From within these categories more specific themes were expected to emerge to guide further research, in order to determine what features make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school.

Assumptions

My research was conducted on the basis of many assumptions. It was assumed that parents, teachers and students would complete the survey or participate in the interview honestly, expressing personal, first-hand impressions and perceptions as to what features make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. Initially, I also assumed that the categories I focused on were important, foundational features that contributed to the distinctiveness of a Christian school. To some extent, I also suggested that the majority of the participants in Edmonton Christian School located their Christian perspective within the "transformational" (Webber, 1979) or "Christ as transformer" (Niebuhr, 1975) worldview. Also, I assumed that parents and teachers had a good knowledge of Christian education at Edmonton Christian School. And, finally, I assumed that the parents, teachers and students had some ability to articulate their Christian perspective and were capable of providing information regarding the Christian perspective of the school.

Internal Limits

The qualitative aspects of this study have been generated within a community in which the researcher is familiar. Being present in this community means that I accept the basic philosophy as advocated by this Society concerning Christian education. I hold many of the same beliefs and values, not only about Christian education, but also about life. However, my background, situated in a different Christian belief system than the founding Christian Reformed members, allowed me to see and possibly understand other points of view. Clearly, my history and personal involvement within this school helped me better determine some of the features to be studied, relate more quickly to the participants and understand the terminology and belief system which undergirds the Christian educational philosophy present at Edmonton Christian School. Although I do not believe it possible for anyone to have a totally objective view toward any study, it is at least important to note that I am personally involved within this particular community.

To conduct this study in a reasonable amount of time, I placed several limitations on this study. Since my area of interest was Edmonton Christian School, I focused my study only within this context. As a case study, it warranted an in-depth look at one school. I wanted to go deeper into the information on one school rather than do a broad overview of two or more schools. The survey sample was limited to this specific school, for the school year 2000 – 2001. Parents, teachers and junior/senior high students involved with Edmonton Christian School, within this time frame, completed the surveys. I limited the student population because I did not believe that the younger students would be able to adequately articulate their perceptions about Christian education. I was sure that the data I would collect from the junior/senior high students would be sufficient as a representation of the overall school experience for students.

Because the surveys were quite extensive, I limited the interviews to nine people, taking several representatives from each selected group. Again, these interviews were more in-depth, with at least two interviews conducted with each participant. From the representative populations, I selected interested participants to be interviewed.

External Limits

The role that specific participants play in the school may determine their understanding of the perspectives. For parents who were not active in the daily operation of the school, I hoped to determine what they felt made Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. These would be participants who, although familiar with the mandates of the vision and mission statements, were not responsible for actively carrying out these mandates. On the other hand, teachers who are also parents may have different perspectives, since they are more directly involved and personally committed to determining what makes Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. It is conceivable that the difference between responses of uninvolved parents, teachers with no children and parent-teachers could be very interesting, considering their perspectives, experiences and personal situations.

I had no control over what individual participants knew or did not know about the Christian distinctiveness of Edmonton Christian School. I hoped that most participants had an understanding of Christian education and were able to personally reflect and express their thoughts and feelings.

The timing of this study was also a factor in influencing responses. Depending on cultural circumstances, people respond. Given that the September 11th, 2001 tragedy in New York occurred after this study was presented and data collected, I can only wonder if some of the safety factors might have taken greater precedent if the study were to be conducted now. Indeed, the time and place of every study, such as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, cannot help but be a limitation in any research that involves people perceiving and evaluating their quality of life.

I believe that participant responses were based on personal experience and the individual's own understanding of events and situations at Edmonton Christian School. I realize the power of gossip, rumour and hearsay. I can only assume and hope that the sources of opinions stated were personal, based on the individual's understanding of first-hand events.

While my own presence within the research community could be seen as a limiting factor, I believe that it was a positive one. It was my intent to search for the details, and, being situated within this community, to offer explanations based on a first-hand understanding of the community. Nevertheless, my personal biases and involvement with the participants may exact some limitations on the findings that are beyond my control. I firmly believe, however, that the benefits outweighed any possible limitations.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Context of our Society Today

Understanding our social context is vital to understanding how youth today are influenced and shaped by society. Van Brummelen (1994) declares, "Our social context shapes our students, ourselves, our schools" (p. 1). Historically, Canadian youth have been shaped by three significant social constructs: family, church and school. Bibby and Posterski (1992) claim that these institutions are the "major forces in forming self-images, transmitting values, conveying beliefs and generally equipping young people for life" (p. 227). Values, obvious in the greater society, "are poured into our schools" (p. 228). An example is seen in the increasing school violence that is in direct relation to the increasing violence in our society. When there is "less sanction of violence in society, there will be less violence in our schools" (p. 229). What happens in the greater culture influences the culture of the schools.

Christian educators need to be informed about the social context in which their schools operate. There appears to be a great deal of literature concerning values and beliefs that pervade our society. Greene (1998), Van Brummelen (1997) and Stronks and Blomberg (1993) are clear in their critique of our post-modern world. With the collapse of modernity, Van Brummelen claims, "People implicitly realize that modernity has failed. Modernism as an ideology is still strong in business, government and the media, but it is no longer seen by the population at large as something to which we can pay allegiance" (p. 93). The learning of facts, concepts and skills prevents personal meaning, and post-modernists claim that modernism has failed. The "technical, research-based approaches have not led to educational utopia" (p. 93). In education, the traditional approaches are sometimes viewed as no longer relevant in certain contexts.

In the light of this deterioration, postmodernism has been labelled the prominent ideology, gaining influence. Critics of postmodernism claim that there are no certainties and no absolute truths in this ideology. Real, objective science is considered an illusion by some researchers; however, the practice of objective science seems to be quite alive in the natural sciences. Ozmon and Craver (1995) suggest that truth depends on intuition, aesthetic appreciation and value-based paradigms (pp. 362-363). Facts are uncertain, open to deconstruction and construction by the individual. Foundational knowledge is denied.

Van Brummelen (1997) quotes a post-modernist, Foucault, in saying that truth, ultimately, is "nothing but a preference about who we wish to stand with in struggle -- whose side we are on socially, politically, and morally" (p. 95). Within this post-modern era, the claim is made that intellect is replaced by will, reason rules emotion and morality overrides relativism. Language makes facts and is not just an expression of facts. Words have no fixed meaning; their interpretation is an exercise, resulting in the interpreter's understanding meaning as he or she chooses.

Greene (1998) believes that this interpretation of the world is extended to all areas of life (pp. 16 -17). The emphasis is on individuals constructing their personal meaning of the world, rather than discovering meaning from the world. Knowledge is relative and there are multiple realities that are all contestable, since there are many people experiencing their own reality. Meaning means different things to different people. No knowable social reality exists beyond signs of language, image and discourse (Van Brummelen, 1997). This deconstruction of social realities gives rise to a plurality of voices. According to Hargreaves (1994), these multiple voices are often neglected or suppressed voices from the past (p. 95), such as those expressed by feminists and minority peoples. Post-modernism appears to be the ideology of the present.

Nevertheless, post-modernism is extensively critiqued by many Christian educators. This post-modern condition is accused as having led to uncertainty and insecurity in most areas of people's lives. There is an increase in job insecurity, moral uncertainty, less than stable relationships and a decrease in long-term commitments. Communication and information overload, frustration due to rapid changes in technology, and serious social, economic and ecological problems are also evidence of a failed ideology. According to Greene (1998), Van Brummelen (1997) and Stronks and Blomberg (1993) these uncertainties and insecurities result in spiritual and social crisis.

Post-modernism has led to economic over-consumption and environmental degradation. We have become super consumers rather than producers. Stronks and Blomberg (1993) discuss DeWitt's seven degradations of creation. In critiquing post-modernist activity in the world, Stronks and Blomberg suggest that our society is faced with land conversion and habitat destruction, species extinction, land degradation, resource conversion and wastes and hazardous productions, global toxification, the alteration of planetary exchange, and human and cultural degradations (p. 53). DeWitt claims, “We have chosen to redefine the long recognized vices of avarice and greed as virtues. We have come to believe that ‘looking out for number one’ means getting more and more for self” (p. 53). These degradations are seen as, “an arrogant assault on the fabric of the biosphere” (p. 53). Ultimately, current Christian educators confirm that this crisis is rooted in a religious misunderstanding of our relationship to the created world and each other.

Media domination is a second powerful result of post-modernism. Although great opportunities are provided by this new technology, there are many disadvantages. Youth values today are mostly transmitted through the media. According to Clark (1989), the social and sexual expectations of youth today are mostly shaped by many hours spent watching television. Youth values and life goals are influenced by television advertising and programming. Leisure time is spent with VCRs, video games, radios with headsets, and computer games. Greene (1998) claims that media advertisers want us to feel and buy, not to think about it (p. 23). According to Postman (1985), reading and reflective thought takes too much effort. Children want speed, toys, sugar and adventure. Thus, educational institutions must act to enhance the advantages of this new technology, rather than passively endure the negative consequences.

Finally, family mobility and social disintegration are increasing realities in our post-modern society. Increased social mobility of the family has led to the need for greater privacy, increased isolation and the loss of a real community. A deterioration in society has resulted in more broken homes, drug and alcohol abuse, consumerism, gangs, suicides, poverty, free floating anxiety, and uncertainty about the meaning of life (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993, p. 55). To compensate for the loss of close-knit communities, there has been a resurgence of tribalism (Greene, 1998). This is described as human allegiance to a smaller group with only a common, more basic identification within a larger context. People seek to belong somewhere; therefore, the small communities continue to develop. Often these communities are formed around shared values and causes. This fragmentation may be most evident in communities where people have felt isolated and exploited; these individuals band together to demand their rights. According to Greene, this growth is most evident in such groups as lesbians, feminists, African Americans, religious communities and private schools. This dominance of minorities divides ethnic groups and minorities and disassociates people from each other (pp. 18-20). Since previously trusted foundations do not exist anymore, the need for smaller communities with a more uniform and stable base is on the rise.

It is in the midst of this post-modern culture of chaos and change that our youth live their lives. As humans, we are influenced and shaped by our societal values and beliefs. The religious educational process must raise the critical consciousness of Christians not to be just another socialization agency. Christians and Christian educators need to address the spiritual and social crisis of our culture. These outcomes have tremendous implications for the education of our children, especially within Christian schools.

A Christian Response to Post-Modern Culture

For the Christian, the spiritual and social crisis of our culture is not surprising, albeit disconcerting. Our post-modern society and the people in it are a reflection of the fall mentioned in the Bible, in Genesis 3. Within the Genesis text we see an explanation of our current societal problems in areas such as ecology, racism, family disintegration, hunger and war. According to Elder, cited in Webber (1979), "We are what we are because we have broken away from God's will. And the history of culture, as well as the turmoil of our own times, witnesses to our alienation" (p. 41). These truths set our lives in perspective with God and history.

In Genesis 4 we see the beginnings of the two lines of humanity. Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, represents the city of God. Cain, the first son, represents the city of man. Webber (1979) sees the cultural development of these two groups as the origin of the "ever present tension between those who desire to unfold culture autonomously without respect to God, and those who wish to unfold culture in keeping with the will of God" (p. 41). Evidenced in the early Genesis account, God calls people to fulfill their cultural role in the world and be active in the development of society. To recognize God as Creator and to identify the activity of people is also to realize that there is no such thing as "a neutral cultural activity." People act from the heart. Human activity in the world is never neutral. A person's cultural activities reflect the internal values that are based on religious convictions about life. Essentially, culture comes from the activity of people in God's created world. Humans unwrap creation and devise a culture that is a reflection of heart values and commitments (p. 19).

Niebuhr (1975) suggests that the forming of culture is a struggle in which all Christians are embroiled, whether they choose to participate in this activity or not. Within the development of a culture there is the constant tension whereby humans are forever seeking to combine peace with prosperity, justice with order, freedom with welfare, truth with beauty, scientific truth with moral good, technical proficiency with practical wisdom, holiness with life, and so on (p. 38). For the Christian, inherent within these struggles is the search for the Kingdom of God. Christians act to create a culture that is already set within a created order and these very activities give evidence of personal beliefs. Because all Christians are not alike they attempt to live in the world, relating their understanding of Christ and culture to their particular habits of living.

In recognition of responsibility given by God, people are called to be caretakers of the created world. Webber (1979) declares that humans are "called to unfold its treasures and to build structures that are in harmony with the cycles, the patterns, and the order of God's creative act" (p. 38). To be culturally responsible would mean taking care of our environment: conserving our land, preserving the various species of life, properly disposing of wastes, preventing the production of hazardous materials, being concerned with cleaning up our world, stabilizing our atmosphere and preserving human dignity. Our politics would not be preserving the "status quo" but seeking justice, promoting peace and living in mercy with all people. Business would contribute to the health of society. There would be a balance of material possessions between all peoples; the gap between rich and poor would be decreasing, not increasing. Wealth would not be sought at the expense of peace and harmony. Ultimately, to be responsible agents in God's creation, humans need to be good stewards of God's gifts, acting in ways that please and glorify the Creator.

Humans, as God's cultural agents, are called and chosen to be active in the development of society. In the New Testament, Jesus spoke a great deal about this society. The teachings of Jesus promote a system of ethics that result in fair, merciful, just and loving relationships. Although there is a sense that this perfect society can only be attained in some eschatological state, the implication is that Christians are to seek and work towards this perfect order on earth, in relationship with each other and the created world. The task of the Christian is not only to live this way, but to be an instrument of God, having responsibility to live in ways that expose evil and promote righteousness.

To be active in influencing this post-modern world, Christians need to counteract society's negative influence. Stronks and Blomberg (1993) propose that the explosion of technological information in the past few decades has greatly changed our lives and ushered in the post-modern world. A Christian response to media domination requires critical discernment of the negative impact of technology. This response also demands creativity in seeing the opportunities afforded by this same technology. The advancement of media provides more knowledge; people are better informed and able to make more responsible decisions. Christians engage in healthy cultural activity by recognizing and accepting the good that is available with the technological gifts given to humans. We must look for good qualities in the media, those values that promote healthy attitudes. Computers, fax machines, cell phones, pagers, television, VCRs and other media need to be wisely used; discernment needs to be taught and modeled. Careful consideration of time is important (p. 54). As God's cultural agents, Christians need to recognize gifts and exercise discernment in using these gifts wisely.

As Christians, caught in the struggle to live in the world and be who we are called to be, the task is challenging. We are a part of this dysfunctional, human society. Stronks and Blomberg (1993) suggest that in our ever-changing post-modern age people have become isolated from each other and communities are fragile and often ineffective (p. 55). This deterioration has profound consequences for our lives and for the next generation. According to Bibby and Posterski (1992), "A better alternative is to encourage a multicultural society to understand and gain an appreciation for what is meaningful – from all points of view, not only our own. Learning to respect one another's beliefs and living peacefully with one another's differences is a social necessity in today's Canada" (p. 223).

Clearly, there are two conflicting influences in the life of Christians – two major powers in their lives. Webber (1979) believes that Christians experience the tension, the pull "between doing the will of God and not doing the will of God, moving toward God and moving away from God. Both these tendencies are evident in every culture. But, the Christian is especially called to live by the one and not the other" (p. 45). Considering the diversity of communities and individuals on earth, each Christian community and each Christian strives to accomplish cultural responsibility in different ways. Throughout history these attempts have resulted in various Christian worldviews. Within this post-modern world, Christians seek a balance, a way to respond to the world and a way to live in the world.

Models of Christian Worldviews

For centuries Christians have struggled with the dilemma of how to decide the relationship between Christ/Christianity and culture. The problem is one of individual conscience of hermeneutics, of tradition within churches, of personality and social context. Often, the dialectic runs between reason versus revelation, religion versus science, natural law versus divine law, state versus church and nonresistance versus coercion. Ultimately, however, Niebuhr (1975) defines these struggles and the imminent conflict amongst Christians as a "wrestling and the reconciliation of faith with faith" (p. 12). Christians, in culture with Christ, are "forever being challenged to abandon all things for the sake of God; and forever being sent back into the world to teach and practice all the things that have been commanded them" (p. 29).

Webber (1979) also emphasizes this tension faced by the Christian to find a way both to live in the world and to live as a Christian disciple of Christ. He claims, "No matter how good a person may attempt to be, he is still caught to one extent or another in the corruption of a system that creates and perpetuates evil. And so the Christian is always trapped in what he is called to be in Christ and what he can actually become in the world. This is the problem of the Christian in culture…" (pp. 25, 26). This is the antithesis of Christianity.

Over the years several models have been proposed to suggest how different types of Christians live in the world and relate to Christ and culture. Niebuhr's (1975) classic work, *Christ and Culture*, presents five basic classifications to describe how Christians interact with culture.

(1) The opposition model is most commonly known as "Christ against culture," which portrays the Christian as antagonistic towards culture. In this view a Christian must choose between Christ and the world. It is a decision for one or the other; you cannot have both.

(2) In the identification model, also known as "Christ of culture," it has been suggested that there is an agreement between Christ and culture. These believers insist on accommodating Christ to culture and selecting from culture what conforms to Christ. Jesus is a hero of human culture and was not sent to oppose the culture but to be a part of the culture in order to guide civilization to the proper goal.

(3) The "Christ above culture" model incorporates some of the identification elements. Christ is the fulfillment of culture's hope to restore a true society, but Christ has elements that do not come from culture nor contribute to it. In this way Christ is above culture because He must give gifts to humans in order for this supernatural society to be a proper society.

(4) The duality model explains the tension between serving two authorities: Christ and Culture. The Christian lives under the law and grace, is a sinner and yet righteous, has doubts but is a believer and has an assurance of salvation but has insecurity on earth. Loyalty must be to Christ and to human society.

(5) Finally, the transformational model recognizes the distinction between God's work in Christ and human work in culture. The Christian is not to be separated from the world nor merely endure being in the world, but must act to convert people in the culture. This active engagement with culture is to transform the culture to God now, not just in the future (pp. 39-43). Clearly, the relationship between Christ and culture is a source of much discussion amongst Christians.

Later theologians and educators considered the work of Niebuhr (1975) and reduced Niebuhr's five models into three basic models. The last three models of Niebuhr are similar in some ways and, although there are differences, it is acceptable to consider these variations as one model. Therefore, the three most commonly proposed models of Christian living, in their relationship between Christ and culture, are the separation model, the identification model and the transformation model (Givens, 1997; Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Webber, 1979; Zylstra, 1961).

The separation worldview is most similar to Niebuhr's "Christ against culture" model. The identification worldview is comparable to the "Christ of culture" model. Also, the transformation worldview contains elements of the "Christ above culture" model, whereby Christians live in tension with culture and engage in the transforming of culture. Each of these models considers the diversity of communities and individual believers.

Each unique Christian strives within his or her community of faith to fulfill the cultural responsibility given by God, as he or she understands it. Niebuhr (1975) proposes that all Christians have answers to understandings of Christ and culture and some of these ideas conflict with each other. Nevertheless, Niebuhr claims that the person of Christ acts to answer these questions "in the totality of history and life in a fashion that transcends the wisdom of all his interpreters yet employs their practical insights and their necessary conflicts" (p. 2). Responding and acting in and with society is an ongoing challenge for Christians.

The Transformational Worldview

For parents and supporters of Christian education at Edmonton Christian School (ECS), the transformational model (Givens, 1997; Niebuhr, 1975; Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Webber, 1979; and Zylstra, 1961) appears to be the model most closely approximating their worldview. In the mission statement for Edmonton Christian School (see Appendix A) this transformational worldview is the underlying framework to describe how these Christians engage in and with culture. Also, the vision statement of ECS (see Appendix B) is a foundational document that supports and specifies this worldview. In general, this view adheres to the belief that the social structure and cultural norms can be converted and changed. Wolterstorff (1980) declares, "Culture forming is our God-ordained, creaturely task" (p. 100). Christians do not have to withdraw from culture or be accommodated to culture to accomplish this task of transforming culture.

Within this Christian worldview, the radical effect of sin on all structures in life is presupposed. This sinful nature is reflected and enlarged in the cultural activity of the world. Nevertheless, the cosmic nature of Christ's redemption makes possible the restoration of all of culture to God. This redemption is far-reaching and personal. It extends into every area of life in the world. Webber (1979) recognizes, "all aspects of life as being under the sovereignty of God and God's Word" (p. 149).

Thus, although all structures of life are affected by sin, they also can be converted and changed. The agents of restoration are the people of God who are to be active in the social world, modeling Christ. The goal of the Christian is to engage in culture and act in society toward "the restoration of the world and of man to the original intent of God" (Webber, 1979, p. 164). Within the Church, this social context is to be modelled. The Christian community "is called to exemplify the principles of the Kingdom and thus to have a saving effect on all the structures of life" (p. 164). In effect, the sinful world waits to be transformed, by Christ, through Christians.

However, the Christian's task is not easy. According to Beversluis (1981), "This is God's world and the Christian's religious calling in it is to transform and restore it until the Lord returns" (p. 17). Thus, activity in the world is not to be neglected. The task of the Christian is to "build a Christian culture, different members of the community specializing in the performance of different aspects of this whole task" (p. 24).

In practical terms this means establishing homes, building a society and government, developing language and laws. It means engaging in philosophy, making dams and churches, creating poems, studying science and appreciating music. It means constructing schools, bridges, ships and relieving suffering by discovering medicine, forming hospitals and dispensing charity. Finally, it means resisting evil, witnessing to God's creative order and wondrous redemptive act and working against sin and its destructive effect in the world.

A Christian must maintain values and a lifestyle that are not of the world, but of Christ. Beversluis quotes Herman Bavinck to depict this struggle, "The Christian needs two conversions: one away from the world to Jesus Christ; the other, in the name of Christ, back to the world" (p. 19). The solution to this dilemma is a continual life-long process. It does not come naturally. Christians need to "practice the presence of God within the totality of their natural, social, cultural and historical existence" (p. 25). This worldview needs to be learned and taught; it needs to be modelled and lived.

The act of transforming culture requires knowledge about the world, God and culture. Christians, therefore, must engage in a biblical way of knowing. According to Stronks and Blomberg (1993), this knowing "implies a many-sided engagement with creation. God taught his people in a variety of ways, and Scripture emphasizes active response to these teachings. Jesus also called his bearers to act on what he taught. All this implies that learning is always dynamic rather than passive in character" (p. 130). Stronks and Blomberg speak of this biblical knowing that

> sees as equal realities both the law of God in creation and the creatures that are subject to it. It is concerned with how to act wisely, that is, with how to act in this particular situation in a way that is faithful to the ordinances of God. Knowing the law of God by rote is but ignorance if one does not act in love; faith without works is dead. Actions in turn are judged wise or foolish depending upon whether or not they are faithful to that law. Truth is what one does (I John 1:6) more than what one says.... Rather than seeing action as an addition to knowledge based in experience or intellect, we recognize that our knowledge begins and ends with whole-embodied interaction with creation. (p. 164)

This understanding requires knowing about God's created world and learning how to act in this world in ways that embody knowledge of God.

Over the past century the role of religion has changed greatly in society. Many people feel Christianity should be relegated to the churches only. What impact or importance does it have for the formation of a society? According to Bibby and Posterski (1992), some people "see no need or place for religion in the modern world. Others are even inclined to censor religion, keep it out of the public forum altogether" (p. 247).

But, in light of our calling to be "salt and light" in the world (Matt. 5:13, 14), Christians take their cultural responsibility seriously, especially those whose foundation is a transformational worldview. They engage in an active role in changing and influencing society. Bibby and Posterski (1992) claim,

> Healthy spirituality is a balance of uncompromising conviction and unrelenting compassion. Conviction invites people to take action and build their lives on principles. Compassion solicits empathy and prompts people to view life from the other person's point of view. When the two virtues co-exist, strength and beauty stand side by side. (p. 247)

Thus, Christians today need firm convictions and Godly compassion that compels them to be active in transforming the world.

To be involved in transforming this present, post-modern culture into the Reign of Christ requires a concentrated effort. Bibby and Posterski (1992) acknowledge that

> religious institutions were more prominent in the past than they are in the present. ...Because of the demotion of organized religion in the culture, the school remains as the one social institution that systematically gathers society together. Especially for young people from homes filled with turmoil, the school is the only adult-managed environment where they can experience life with predictability. (p. 227)

Although it is true that the Church of the past performed the function of providing religious education, that has changed greatly.

Education is a powerful tool to equip young people to live in society. According to Palmer (1993), "education gives an identity to the world in which we live" (p. 21). The world is what your knowledge pictures it to be. The scope of the world is equal to one's understanding of the world. Knowledge places the world and the cultures of the world under the power of the learner; the one who knows and understands has power, for knowledge is power (p. 21). Young people today need an identity.

As Christian educators, we must agree with Van Brummelen (1994) that, "if the Bible is relevant for all of life, then it is also relevant for education" (p. 25). In the past, education was often relegated to the home and church. However, Van Til (1971) states, "neither the church nor the home can deal at all adequately with the length and breadth of Christ as Saviour and Transformer of human culture" (p. 23). He claims that only in school where professional people engage in setting forth the whole history and meaning of human culture, can Christ and his work be portrayed in full detail.

It is in this learning that the student discovers how God works out his program of removing all that separates humans from God and directing all that accomplishes human reunion with God (Van Til, 1971, p. 24). Christians, whose perspective falls within this transformational view of the world, are often actively engaged in the religious education of their children. This education goes beyond the church and home and incorporates Christian education within schools.

Toward Transformational Christian Education

A significant way to bring change is to educate. Education forms and moulds people. Van Brummelen (1994) claims "education always involves initiation and socialization" (p. 56). Schools need to be vehicles of instruction and nurture. Van Brummelen states, "Instruction helps students learn essential concepts and skills" (p. 55). These skills are needed in order for students to become active and participating members of our society. However, education is more than simply instructing students in the acquisition of concepts and skills. Schools must also nurture, "to develop attitudes, foster the acceptance of values, instill dispositions, and encourage commitments in harmony with an underlying worldview" (p. 55). If change is needed, education is the vehicle. Groome (1980) alludes to Freire's "praxis of education" to define the purpose of schooling. Education is an exercise toward freedom. Problem-solving and critical reflection are important skills, instead of just "banking" information. Critical reflection leads to action that accentuates the process of humanization (pp. 175 – 176). Reflection and action are significant in transforming the world.

Considering the negative consequences that often flow from our post-modern culture, it is vital that Christians act to bring change. According to Bibby and Posterski (1992),

> unless young people get a formal and systematic setting to figure out their values and beliefs, they will have no other alternative but to assimilate what is important to them in an ad-hoc and laissez-faire fashion. … Without formal input for their value-shaping and character formation, young people are susceptible to adopting what is implicit and undefined. They are prone to embrace as their own what is appealing in their friends, what they see paraded on television, and what is modelled by their parents and other significant adults in their lives. The process is more unconscious than conscious, more accidental than

> deliberate. Without specific instructions, they are vulnerable to assimilating values in a vacuum and accepting unexamined beliefs. (p. 249)

For some Christian parents the need for Christian education is considered to be an essential part of their children's development. Through this process of Christian education, Christian parents who decide to send their children to Christian schools hope that their children will assimilate Christian values and beliefs.

So, what is Christian education? Many people have preconceptions and misconceptions of what a Christian school is and should be. Educators in the field of Christian education remind us that every Christian school is different, just as every individual is unique. Vander Spruit (1999) collected opinions from many Christian parents supportive of Christian schools. Meester, a parent, claims that a Christian school

> is not an angel factory, a church, a social club, a closed-door-members-only club. It's not a shove-it-down-your-throat centre of indoctrination. It's not a boot camp for problem cases. It's not just for the rich and famous. It's not a shelter. It's not a suit and tie prep school. It's not Dutch, or Italian, or Latvian. It's not a place just for future teachers and preachers. (pp. 26-27)

But, what is it? Stronks and Blomberg (1993) claim that a Christian school needs "to narrate -- to tell the story, to identify the social and cultural influences, to put up the mirror of self-recognition, to acknowledge both successes and sins -- in order to know how institutions have both stood against and accommodated themselves to the surrounding culture" (p. 56). The mandate of Christians is to provide their children with a Christian education, to educate their children intentionally in the transformational Christian worldview.

Although worldviews are generally unconscious foundations, Christian educators need to be critical in discerning underlying worldviews. According to Greene (1998) there are several important educational implications educators need to consider in the effort to educate Christianly. He claims that facts are never neutral; humans are capable of change. Religion is not separable from life; students should be instructed in all aspects of life, and, values are not separate from knowledge of the world (pp. 27-30). Christian education, therefore, is a deliberate, intentional act of educating students toward a Christian worldview.

Facts are facts – true? No! Christian educators need to recognize that facts are never neutral (Greene, 1998, p. 27). Zylstra (1961) declares that Christian education is about discerning "the God behind the culture, the assumption underlying the thought, the dogma beneath the action, the soul in the body of the thing" (p. 99). Being neutral is impossible, "certainly impossible in so fundamentally human a thing as education" (p. 101). The business of Christian schools is to disclose, to understand and judge what is true and what is good.

Greene (1998) encourages Christian educators to affirm children as self-conscious human beings, capable of change (p. 28). Change is what all humans do. Each person, from birth, is in the process of being formed and developed as God's creation. None of us could teach or learn anything if God were not always involved in the process at each moment. We live and move and have our being in God. As educators this means that ordinary studies are not just ordinary. Since God is known through creation, Christian educators must not treat school studies "which are derived totally from the created world, as if they had nothing to do with God" (p. 44-45). Students come to know God in and through ordinary school subjects. This knowing, in turn, contributes directly to a deepened relationship with the Creator. All this involves self-change, conscious and unconscious, with the intention of leading students to fellowship with God and others.

Religion, or Christian belief, is an integral part of all life (Greene, 1998; Groome, 1980; Stronks & Blomberg, 1993; Van Brummelen, 1994; Zylstra, 1961). Religious belief and action ought not to be separated from any aspect of life. If God is excluded, another Being or Object will be created to exercise power and influence. Christian faith is spiritual and cannot be separated from the Christian's living in society, in obedience to God. Educators in a Christian school must emphasize the wholeness of the person. Beversluis (1971) suggests that educators must "emphasize that so far from being alien to the natural, cultural, historical conditions of [their] existence, the Christian life of faith is impossible without them. It is in the world, as human, that one is a Christian" (p. 27). This is discipleship to God, in all of life. To really live as a human is to live a religious life in response to God.

Education in a Christian perspective should instruct students in every aspect of life (Beversluis, 1971; Greene, 1998; Knight, 1998; Stronks & Blomberg, 1993; Van

Brummelen, 1994; Zylstra, 1961). Christian education is not just education of life deemed to be Christian in some obtuse fashion, but is education for every possible dimension of what it means to live in this world. Christians have often been accused of hiding their heads in the sand, avoiding the negative or potentially risky elements of culture that they do not know how to deal with.

Greene (1998) suggests that one such area in this post-modern culture has been the area of the media. Instead of avoiding the technological advancements of this era Christians need to jump into this knowledge explosion and be educated. It is vital that educators and parents guide students in learning about and responding to the new technology. This means teaching critical discernment, encouraging students to see and create new opportunities while being better informed to make responsible decisions (p. 29). Christian educators should instruct students in such a way that learning and experiencing God's world permeates every detail of ordinary life in the world.

Finally, Greene (1998) informs educators that values are essential and inherent in all actions based on our knowledge and understanding of the created order (p. 30). Niebuhr (1975) states, "Culture in all its forms and varieties is concerned with the temporal and material realization of values" (p. 36). These values may be tangible, such as the need or desire for food, drink, clothes or progeny. Or, these values may be intangible, such as reputation, beauty, truth and goodness.

Conserving values is as much a concern as realizing what the values are. Great energy is often spent preserving a culture of made and inherited values, such as those in our institutions of church and school. However, simply repairing or fixing something is not enough. Values must be internalized. Values "need to be written afresh, generation by generation, 'on the tablets of the heart'" (Neibuhr, 1975, p. 37). And yet, educators must leave room for individuals to grow and develop unique personalities, enhancing their own created self and value. Since God speaks and acts through the "facts" of His creation, it is impossible to separate our knowing from the values or beliefs we embrace.

Transformational Christian education should not be confused with the transformational model of schooling. Stronks and Vreugdenhill (1992) compare three basic secular models of schooling: the traditional model (pp. 18-19), the progressive-inquiry model (pp. 19-20) and the transformational model (pp. 20-21).

(1) Within the traditional model, the focus of learning "is on the achievement of intellectual knowledge and skills of a defined program of studies by means of teacher-directed instruction in a competitive, controlled learning environment" (p. 34). Critics of this model describe school as "a place chilled by sterile intellectualism in which an authoritarian teacher forces a meaningless menu of dry, pre-selected programs on a class of listless, bored students" (p. 18). This model forces questions concerning teacher authority, the place of a specific, defined program of studies and the legitimacy of only teacher-directed instruction.

(2) In the progressive-inquiry model the educational focus "is on maximizing the individual's potential, self-esteem and process skills by means of thematic studies in a risk-free, caring environment" (p. 34). This is somewhat a mixed approach with an emphasis on developing student self-esteem and learning skills. How students learn seems more important than what students learn. Success "is the personal growth of the individual learner who needs to be an autonomous, independent problem-solver" (p. 19). Within these classrooms circle sessions alleviate social-emotional tension, there is continuous progress to avoid failure, cooperation replaces competition, individualized programs meet student needs and anecdotal records replace grades. Critics suggest that this approach is in direct opposition to the traditional model, a way of escaping that which was deemed to be too harsh. Some educators and parents believe that this learning-teaching style is too individualistic.

(3) On the other hand, the transformational model of schooling focuses "on empowering the student for independent, autonomous social action by means of a problem posing, reflective, educational encounter with co-operative learning strategies in a collaborative classroom environment" (p. 34). Within this model, schooling appears to take two slightly different directions: a *holistic* education that concentrates on authentic, personal freedom and a *praxis* education that involves students in experiences to correct social problems. Both streams share the belief that the progressive-inquiry model is too individualistic in personal growth and process skills development.

> Holistic education focuses on relationships in linear thinking, between mind and body, between domains of knowledge, between the individual and the community, and the relationship within one's self (p. 20). Praxis education has a social agenda, a desire that the student will achieve a sense of personal freedom and be capable of being autonomous and responsible in society. The need to bring change, to transform society, is emphasized in both streams. Teachers and students are "encouraged to share their observations of a particular present action (e.g., classroom management), enter into a dialogue of critical reflection (e.g., the benefit of rules) and engage in responsive action (e.g., negotiate standards of behaviour) (p. 21). Social skills and relationship development are fundamental to collaborative learning, self and peer evaluation, negotiating content to be learned and in sharing responsibility for the teaching-learning experience.

Stronks and Vreugdenhill (1992) claim that although all three secular models have problematic elements (p. 22) they each have worthwhile elements that have a place in Christian education. The basic problem of traditional schooling is not its emphasis on imparting a body of knowledge in a structured environment. Authoritative, teacher-directed learning does not have to lead to the creation of passive students. The problem with the traditional, secular model of schooling is its emphasis on intelligence,

> The intellectual focus promotes a faith in scientism, the belief that knowledge can be reduced to facts and reason. When that occurs, the explanation of weather, for instance, is limited to such scientific facts as the movement of air masses and the flow of the jet stream. It remains caught up in a naturalistic view of creation. (p. 22)

Likewise, the progressive-inquiry approach to schooling, with a focus on the individuality of the student and the development of process skills, is an important aspect of education that can enrich the practice of Christian schooling. However, the danger is seen when the "self-cultivation and problem-solving skills become the organizing principles of program and pedagogy" (p. 22). Finally, Christian educators endorse some aspects of the transformational model of schooling as correctly emphasizing student involvement and responsibility in society. However, "the central themes of transcendence, autonomy and emancipation are problematic and conflict with the normative character of Christian schooling" (p. 22). Schools should prepare students for active participation in society.

Essentially, transformational, Christian educators find it problematic that each of the models elevates key features of schooling and education

> to a superior, controlling position to which all other aspects of schooling are to be subordinated, thereby distorting their meaning and place within the schooling process. Placing the growth of the student on a pedestal is absolutizing one component at the expense of the other aspects. No part of schooling may be assigned such autonomy. Fundamentally, that is a form of idol worship, whether that aspect is the intellect, the child or the process. (Stronks & Vreugdenhill, 1992, p. 23)

Therefore, each secular model of schooling has some key aspect that is emphasized. This emphasis becomes paramount to all else. For the Christian educator, this is a problem.

Indeed, there are some best features from the traditional, progressive-inquiry and transformational models of secular schooling that have a place in Christian education. However, these key features first need to be shaped by a biblical perspective. For example, according the Stronks and Vreugdenhill (1992), "Biblical knowing may not be reduced to the intellectual knowing of the traditional schooling model" (p. 22). Each focus in the secular school models needs to be reshaped and configured to be Christian. This is transformational, Christian education. This shaping to

> normative Christian schooling assigns biblical meaning to each aspect of schooling, recognizing the inter-dependent relationships and contributing in a special way to serve the Lord with head, heart and hands. This distinctive, holistic integration within its stated premises is the basis of the practice of Christian schooling. (p. 22-23)

The focus of the normative Christian school model is

> on instructing the student within the framework of the normative premises, for life of Christian service by means of a defined program of studies that: encourages commitment to God, discloses nature and culture, develops literacy, guides towards maturity, with a variety of teacher-directed pedagogic strategies in a nurturing environment. (p. 34)

Basically, then, Christian education is about teaching students how to be Christian in the world. According to Ellul (1967), Christians "must not act in exactly the same way as everyone else" (p. 28). Christians have a part to play that no one else can do. They are called to be "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5: 13) and "lights of the world" (Matt. 5:14). As salt and light, Christians are to be the visible sign of Jesus Christ in the world. Ellul suggests, "Christians should really be this sign" (p. 10). In words and actions Christians should live life so that others see the difference. As salt is noticeable when present or absent in food, so Christians should be noticeably present or absent in society. Likewise, Ellul advocates that Christians be God's lights to eliminate darkness and "give meaning and direction to the history of the world" (p. 10). Christians engage in Christian education to be God's salt and light in the world, to transform the world to Christ.

Toward a Transformational Practice of Christian Education

Christian education plays an important role in the ongoing development and formation of our culture. Knowledge of our current society allows Christian educators to construct a framework for school and curriculum to prepare students for meaningful, responsible roles in today's culture. Personal values and positions in society will speak loudly as to how we develop and implement educational curriculum in our Christian school classrooms. It is important to remember, according to Fowler, Van Brummelen and van Dyk (1990) that "The distinctiveness of Christian schooling, in the final count, will not be found in the detail but in the way it is all put together" (p. 14).

Overall educational patterns may be seen as Christian, but they might not necessarily be seen as clearly in a specific class or subject area. It is when the whole is viewed, not isolated parts. Vander Spruit (1999) claims that a Christ-centered education must be evident in the curriculum and in devotions. It must be visible on bulletin boards in halls and classes but also modeled by Christian teachers. Mistakes will be made and are made. Relationships will break down, but there is forgiveness, help and healing (p. 25).

Christian education is not just about subjects and courses. According to van Manen (1991), "Real learning is never merely intellectual growth," but encompasses the whole person (pp. 189-190). Christian education must involve the whole child, the whole school. Palmer (1993) suggests that the whole culture of a school,

> its system of words and punishments works to shape our views of self and world. In fact, the rules and relationships of a school comprise a 'hidden curriculum' which can have greater formative power over the learners than the curriculum advertised in the catalogue. (pp. 19-20)

Although Christian education is inclusive of the academic aspects of education, there is much more at stake. The underlying perspectives, attitudes, values and the subtle influences of the Christian environment are vital components that lead to growth in the child.

Furthermore, according to Knight (1998), "Christian education that is Christian in fact, rather than merely in word, must view the nature and potential of the student, the role of the teacher, the content of the curriculum, the methodological emphasis, and the social function of the school in the light of its philosophic undergirding" (p. 191). Christian education involves the atmosphere for learning, the relationships created and sustained between all people in the school, the means by which faith and the Christian perspective are conveyed to the students in direct biblical teaching and as integrated into all parts of the academic curriculum and the life of the school. Clearly, Christian educators predict that these are some of the essential factors necessary for successful Christian education.

Faith Integration

The integration of Christian faith into school is to prepare young people to live in obedience to God, in the world. Each Christian school will determine its own vision of Christian education and participate in a commitment to fulfill these strategies according to their mandate. Fowler, Van Brummelen and van Dyk (1990) suggest it is "not enough that we write and subscribe to creeds and statements of faith in relation to our schooling. We need to develop meaning of these creeds in educational practice that is submissive to Scripture" (p. 15). Also, Groome (1980) claims, "lived faith experience needs to be informed by the Christian faith tradition and the appropriating of the tradition needs to be informed by, and be in the context of, lived faith experience" (p. 220).

The integration of faith into education requires much more than "lip service" to the notion of Christian education. Beversluis (1971) insists that the perspective must be "specific, focused and tested in life itself" (p. 19). Program strategies must be equipped with aims and goals to provide and change young persons to be in line with the perspective and commitment of the school (p. 19). This Christian worldview must be obvious in school programs.

From their research on youth, Bibby and Posterski (1992) suggest three major emphases in the faith journey of youth today. These apply to the integration of faith in the Christian classroom. Most importantly, Christian educators must encourage students to experience God (p. 259). This experience needs to be personal as the student begins to explore the mysterious realm of the divine. This personal experience elevates the student from just knowing the world to believing in the God of the world. Second, faith integration means equipping students to interact with the real world and the range of people who intersect their lives (p. 259). Faith in God is about loving your neighbour and living together in society. It involves acting mercifully and seeking justice. It requires responsible freedom -- to act in ways that bring freedom to the people of the world.

Finally, according to Bibby and Posterski (1992), faith integration in the classroom requires Christian educators to give students a coherent sense of self (p. 259). Vital to a student's faith development is a healthy self-esteem. It is important to love the self enough, but not so much that others are demoted. To love God, to care for self and others will engage youth in active learning. The search for "connections between theory and practice, for coherence between words and deeds" (p. 268) is the life-long task of the Christian educator. This responsibility must eventually be transmitted to students.

Beversluis (1971) suggests that students need to learn that all of life is to be one of discipleship to the Creator; this is the essence of Christian education. Christian education is not for a passive contemplation of God but for active service, not to separate religion courses from other curricular courses but to put everything in a Christian perspective, not to add faith to understanding but to see faith realized in life (p. 28). A Christian school should be a place where children discern religious direction in order to make wise choices. Vander Spruit (1999) claims students should be grounded in Christian principles and be able to critique and break through false teachings of the post-modern world. In this way students get ready for a Christian life of responsibility (p. 95). Ultimately, Christian education must promote a Christian way of living -- a life of faith lived in responsible discipleship.

Curriculum and Academics

Christian education is about educating students to live life to the fullest. To educate, according to Wolterstorff (1980), is to develop curriculum and learning based in the students' own experience of God's reality. Learning is also cognitive and intellectual, the increase in ability, capacity, competence or skill. It requires altering the inclinations or dispositions of the students to act in certain ways in various circumstances (p. 4). To act and live responsibly requires knowledge. Knowledge includes knowing God's world and the normative laws for action. It means acquiring abilities to act in a certain way -- to discern, develop competencies, skills and capabilities to engage in responsible action. Ultimately, knowing means, "to have knowledge of the relevant matters and the ability to perform the relevant actions" (p. 2). Students must be educated to know how to be Christian in all of life.

The education of students is what Christian education is all about. Zylstra (1961) emphasizes the educative aspect of schools, "Schools must be schools, our education education" (p. 94). Schools are more than places of socialization and the acquiring of a Christian perspective on life. They must educate students about the world and life. Students must be informed about the past, realize the present and have hope for the future. As humans we grow in a natural environment and engage in cultural activities located within a particular historical situation on earth. We are not exempt from culture, social responsibility and political obligations. Through art, literature, history, philosophy, science, reason, "our moral and religious choice for the spiritual kingdom of Christ becomes concrete, real and meaningful" (p. 94).

According to Zylstra (1961) the essence of Christian distinctiveness is not devotions, Bible study, evangelism, prayer or meditation, but in the character and integration of the curriculum with a Christian perspective. It is education toward responsible discipleship. In the study of different subjects the religious person must enter into the scientific, aesthetic, social and practical dimensions of humanity. All of these "are involved in the shaping and maturing of the Christian choice for God. These are the main business of the school as school. ... education as education must be Christian" (p. 96).

Often the great debate in education is whether teachers teach the curriculum or teach students. Beversluis (1971) appeals to Christian educators to avoid this dichotomy. Both curriculum and students are important. In support of both positions Beversluis quotes Jaarsma and Jellema. Jaarsma's major thesis states that education is about,

> education as *response*, that education will fail unless it is suited to the learner, to his previous learnings, to his emerging self-awareness; that nothing is learned, educationally or religiously, until it is learned in the *heart*, until it is understood, appropriated and responded to deep down where a person lives; and then even the best of curriculum will be unrewarding and oppressive unless the learner's response to it is vital and cumulative in the ongoing *process* of personal growth. (p. 35)

On the other hand, Jellema's major thesis states that education is about,

> education as *encounter*; that the right things, the most educationally rewarding things – the things that a school as *school* must teach about the wholeness of life and truth as given – must be studied; that as all education is by and for a kingdom, demanding ultimate allegiance, so Christian education must serve the *civitas dei*; and that even the best of both method and aim will be short-circuited unless they are joined to a *required* curriculum whose well-taught content disciplines young Christians for living the full-orbed Christian life. (p. 36)

Both the objective, content-based emphasis of the curriculum and the subjective, person-based emphasis of the individual response are equally important in teaching. Neither condition is self-sufficient; they are both necessary. Christian educators understand the task of education as leading students into discipleship, into an "encounter" with God and the world. This is a content-based education. Also, Christian educators understand the task of education as personal and unique, requiring that students respond to that which has been encountered in the curriculum. This response requires a personal knowing, a personal relationship with a loving God. If both these approaches are equally emphasized, the learner is changed by the understanding of God's world and responds to the learning by living responsibly in society as God's disciple. Ultimately, "a school's curriculum must be organized for learning, and a young person's learning must be in response to curriculum" (p. 36). Christian school education must be balanced.

The curriculum must meet the needs of the whole child: spiritual, social, academic (intellectual) and physical. Christian education does not simply add a Bible course to the curriculum, a "chocolate coated Christianity" as Knight (1998) so aptly describes (p. 215). The message of the Bible becomes basic truth that educators seek to impart to students through the teaching of varied subjects; it sets the framework. The Bible is not a sufficient authority in all detailed areas of possible truth, but it informs and shapes the worldview, the foundation, for all human knowledge. The overall meaning of the gospel needs to penetrate every area of the school and the curriculum, to add significance and purpose. The Word of God, the message inherent in the Christian perspective, "is not frosting on an otherwise unaltered humanist cake. It needs to be the leaven in the educational loaf, shaping the entire curriculum from its base up as it permeates the whole school program" (p. 215). In this integration model of Christian education every school subject is approached in the light of the Biblical perspective so that it is understood in it's fullest. Christian education is a response to the whole reality of life. According to Beversluis (1971), Christian school curriculum must involve a response to the physical world, human society, culture and history. All these are studied in light of their relationship to God.

The general core curriculum emphasizes verbal and mathematical learning to promote the learner's self-acceptance and participation in learning in and outside of school. In the natural sciences and math students are exposed to the physical, natural environment, learning laws of God's created world and understanding how to use and appreciate nature while living in harmony with its ways. In social studies, students examine the life of societies and the social environment to understand human needs, tensions in relationships, institutions and communities. As members in society students learn to appreciate and participate with others in obedience to God's laws. Studies in history reveal relationships of the past and present while instilling meaning and importance to choices that result in future consequences. The study of literature and the arts allows creative growth as students respond to living in the world of nature, society and history. Developing their creative gifts leads to a personal identity and recognition of the gifts of others. Religious study, as a separate course, a complementary course, will enrich all others (pp. 37-52). Within all these subjects, relations are enhanced and the student is directed into relationship with God, others and the world.

This integrated view of curriculum and the Creator reveals how God's Word helps us understand every topic in the curriculum. At the same time, curricular studies shed light on the meaning of God's Word. Since all Truth originates with God, both curriculum studies and biblical studies complement each other. According to Mechielsen (1979), through Christian education "Children are brought face to face with the wonderful diversity of creation, to touch, taste, smell, feel and see that diversity enriching their experience by guided disciplined reflection" (p. 101). Mechielsen (1979) speaks of de Graaff's favourite example of a distortion that occurs in some curricular studies, as it relates to how students experience weather:

> At the kindergarten level, children are often encouraged to respond to the weather in its feeling and aesthetic dimensions, even to its confessional aspect. They are led to imitate the rain with their fingers, to move their bodies in the wind, to paint a sunset or to thank God for a sunny day. It is not long, however, before they are admonished to 'leave behind childish ways', and to 'know' the weather as a mere 'factual thing'. The encyclopedias and textbooks describe weather in entirely physical terms, as the interaction of land, air, sun and moon; we are so used to this way of thinking about weather that we don't even experience it as abnormal, a horrible distortion of the truth. (p. 50)

In Christian education, de Graaff goes on to propose that students should be taught to view weather Christianly, whereby children are led to be followers of Christ in their daily living. In the context of Christian education weather should be viewed differently,

> as part of the created order, weather is a servant of the other realms of creation, the plant, animal and human realms. Wind, lightning and rain are God's servants and messengers; weather is not part of a closed-off, autonomous world of cause and effect, that exists in and for itself. Weather is open to God's ruling and [human] faith; it is a direct expression of God's love and judgment.
>
> Weather functions in all aspects of reality. It can give rise to different feelings, for example. This is a real part of the phenomenon of weather, that it evokes feelings; this is not a subjective addition to physical things. Weather must be taken into account in transport, human survival, agriculture.
>
> Our response to weather is part of our God-given responsibility. We must respond to weather for the benefit of all [people]. We must respond to the ultimate meaning of weather, as an expression of God's longsuffering and judgment: this is the truth about the fact of weather. The child will learn to know [him or her self] safe in a frightening storm, knowing that nothing can separate him from the love of God. [The child] will learn to play joyfully in the sun (and the snow!) [The child] will pray for weather that will suit not only his own ends, but which will benefit all. [The child] will be motivated by the weather to praise God. (pp. 50-51)

The integrality of God's creation must be seen in the very structure of curricula. Even the most ordinary of life's experiences should be translated into the context of God's world and revealed to the students.

In learning to experience the world as an integrated whole the student will be led to view all things in reference to God and to all other creatures. All our experience "lingual, emotional, social, technical, ethical, etc. refers beyond itself to the God Who ordains it" (p. 51). Integration in curriculum will be most obvious when lessons focus on concrete things that are easily seen to function in all aspects of created reality, while remaining as whole objects. Mechielsen, again, gives an example of a tree as a concrete, singular object:

> A tree, for example, is a 'concrete' individual object, yet because of the ways in which God has structured creation, it functions in all creation's aspects, aspects which are distinguishable one from another because of the special law-structure or nature God has given them. The tree has a numerical aspect and is therefore subject in that respect to mathematical laws; it has a spatial aspect and therefore subject to geometrical laws; it can be considered physically, kinematically and biotically; it can be object of our feelings, a landmark in our history, painted by an artist, the subject of a legal dispute; the tree can even function in the middle of a community as an object of faith. (p. 101)

However, there is more than just the concrete approach to be used by educators. Especially when teaching older students, Mechielsen (1979) says,

> it will be necessary to focus on particular aspects of the creation, for example the mathematical, the historical, the aesthetic, and students should be enabled to see the uniqueness of these aspects in relation to each other. Such concentration on particular aspects is good so long as their relationships with the other aspects is not lost sight of, e.g. in studying the growth life of a tree (biotic aspect) we can remind students what the laws of tree growth do not 'explain' the full meaning of the tree's existence; the 'scientific formula' approach such as saying 'water is H20' (full stop) constitutes an idolatrous reduction of God's creation to a mere concept. God's world is not a world of concepts, but a world of people, animals, plants and things. (p. 101)

No matter what the student's age, Christian educators need to help students integrate all of life into the realm of God's world.

Christian educators lead students to see God as central to creation. And, creation is central to learning. As learners it is important to recognize the rich diversity of God's world. Through experiences in education students come to know the creation and the Creator. According to Beversluis (1971), students learn by the curriculum -- they encounter it and are motivated, changed, interested, moved or grow. At the same time it is the curriculum -- the facts, knowledge, understandings and the disciplining experiences

-- that provides space and place for the learning (p. 37). The task of the Christian educator is to enlarge the student's life. That means presenting students with "blocks of matter that do not come up on a playground or in ordinary life" (p. 37). These blocks, however, "come up in a school, in the curriculum" (p. 37).

When curriculum is used wisely, students learn and grow. Beversluis (1971) suggests that a wise Christian teacher's "response to the fullness and excitement of curriculum …promotes the interest, activity, participation, discovery and freedom that constitute learning. And it is to encounter the human person, his capacities, experience, readiness, needs, that the wise teacher organizes, shapes and introduces curriculum" (p. 37). In Christian education students come to see the big picture -- the Creator, the creation and their role in the world.

A major component of education is evaluation. Many times evaluation is seen as a necessary evil. It is required to account for learning that occurs. Those responsible for the operation of the school, parents, teachers, administrators, school boards and government agencies, need the assurance that learning occurs in school. In recent years the evaluative aspect of education has received increased focus that has led to an increase in standardized testing of all students.

In Alberta, achievement tests are mandatory for grades three, six and nine students. Also, the Edmonton Public School board requires students to write HLAT tests (Highest Level of Achievement Test) each year, to assess reading and writing skills of all students. Comparisons are made between students. Schools are rated. Students are labelled.

Stonks and Blomberg (1993) discuss evaluation in Christian education. They propose that Christian educators learn to develop, as an integral part of the curriculum, a process of evaluation, "in ways that enable students to unfold their gifts, and share the burden of difficulties in learning, to celebrate the joys of accomplishments. The purpose of evaluation is, first of all, to encourage and improve student learning" (p. 275). Through this type of evaluation, strengths and weaknesses are identified to design teaching to meet individual needs. Christian educators should not evaluate just for the sake of evaluation, "but for the sake of being more effective servants of the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 276). This means engaging assessment strategies that "promote humble service rather than self-glorifying achievement and a positive account of abilities rather than a low estimate of self" (p. 277). According to Fowler (1987), "Assessment must be directed toward assessing the particular type of equipment each student possesses and how that student can most effectively be developed for fruitful service in caring development of God's creation" (p. 17). Ultimately, evaluation should help the students to grow and become all that God means them to be.

However, education is not just to assimilate an understanding about the world or to achieve academic success. And, Christian educators should not be involved in simply propagating a Christian worldview. A Christian view of the world requires a cognitive response and this response must become a Christian way of life. Wolterstorff (1980) highlights the essential goal of Christian education: "Christian education is education aimed at training for the Christian way of life, not just education aimed at inculcating the Christian world and life view" (p. 14). This way of life "points to a certain way of living and acting -- one in which a person lives and acts responsibly in obedience to God's will, as an agent of God's cause in the world" (p. 14). Fowler, Van Brummelen and van Dyk (1990) state, "True knowledge involves committed action, in thought, word and deed" (p. 172). Christian education must provide a Christian worldview that leads to Christian action.

Education also provides a means for students to enter society and influence or change, if necessary, that very society in which they live. Beversluis (1971) declares, "schools must be deeply concerned, on the one hand, to keep students from accommodating their actions and attitudes to non Christian standards and, on the other, to impel students outward into life -- into the world of people, of institutions, of needs, of Christian opportunity. Not accommodation to society, not flight from society, but Christian life in the midst of society is what the schools must emphasize" (p. 31).

Learning must inform and prepare students to live in the midst of ordinary human society. The goal of Christian learning is to "acquaint the student with the world in which he will have to live out his life" (Beversluis, 1971, p. 32). It is to "prepare students to live a knowledgeable, responsible and creative, Christian life in contemporary society" (p. 32). Students must learn to understand this society, resist evil, accept the good and varied gifts of society, support society in doing the world's work and enrich it by offering

God's love and truth. If Christian education is successful, "it will become a response by young persons to their appointment by God to the fullness of life: to life's complexity and variety, its mysteries and wonders, its gifts and opportunities, its needs and problems, its work and worship" (p. 50). Christian education must be both Christian and education at the same time; they are not exclusive, but each enriches the other.

Teachers and Administrators

It has often been suggested that, to have Christian education, one must simply have Christian teachers. Vander Spruit (1999) quotes from "The Communicator," a Christian newsletter: "Just because the teacher is Christian doesn't mean the education is" (p. 96). In discussing Christian education and Christian teachers with my good friend A. Berry (personal communication, March 10, 2000), pointed out that, in the phrase "a Christian teacher," it is important to note that the word "Christian" is an adjective describing the teacher. A teacher may be a Christian and hold a Christian worldview, but we cannot assume that he or she teaches Christianly. To say that a teacher "teaches Christianly" is to use the word "Christianly" to describe the action and practice of teaching. Christian education means action. Christian education means to teach Christianly rather than just having a Christian teacher teaching. Greene (1998) states, "Teaching Christianly is not only a science but also an art, and its effectiveness depends heavily on the level of the teacher's own communion with God" (p. 185). Ideally, Christian education is about Christian teachers teaching Christianly.

However, there is no doubt that quality Christian education requires competent Christian teachers and a uniquely Christian curriculum. Christian teachers teaching Christianly are challenged to articulate and model to the students a Christian perspective. Van Brummelen, in Van Brummelen and Elliot (1997), claims, "Teachers are in the business of enabling students to function as responsible, capable highly principled and compassionate persons. They must be disposed to contribute to the well being of society" (p. 106). Bibby and Posterski support this view that young people benefit most when they "observe adults dealing with the creative tension that comes when there is a commitment to both conviction and compassion" (p. 252). Christian teachers must embrace a religious, moral and social framework grounded in a defensible worldview.

Van Brummelen declares that teaching also demands committing oneself to making a difference in the lives of students, and nurturing them so that they in turn will make a difference in their cultural context" (Van Brummelen & Elliot, 1997, p. 107). To accomplish this momentous task, Christian teachers must base their teaching and living on life-affirming principles that recognize that God speaks to us in and through our physical and social worlds, and gives us basic norms that guide our living (Psalm 19). God has created. We respond by grappling with life as His images in a postmodern world" (p. 107). It is within this grappling that teachers know their own imperfections.

Greene (1998) suggests that teachers need to "be with" students, pointing ahead of them and of themselves also (p. 17). Christian teachers do not simply give answers, but they provide guidance and support based on their present understanding. According to Anderson, in Van Brummelen and Elliot (1997), teachers are "servant leaders" and "living epistles" (II Corinthians 3:2). Using this metaphor, teachers become the living example, the living curriculum. Knight (1998) states,

> The teacher as a role model is crucial in the area of character development. ... Within the formal schooling system the teacher is the most influential educational professional in terms of impact upon maturing young people. It is the teacher -- and not the superintendent, principal, curriculum specialist or counselor -- who stands at the place where the adult world and the world of the child meet. The non-teaching position, ideal curriculum, latest teaching tools, and flawless organizational pyramid are marginal unless there are quality human relationships at the point where students encounter a school's teachers. (p. 201)

In Christian education, learning and teaching become a team effort as students and teachers strive together to understand and become responsible disciples.

For the Christian teacher to teach Christianly means embracing life that is redemptive, recognizing God as the ultimate power and source of strength. Van Brummelen, in Van Brummelen and Elliot (1997) proposes that this Christian teaching will be evident in vital ways as the Christian teacher recognizes and promotes God's love, peace and justice. The purpose of teaching is to empower the students to foster justice and mercy. This necessitates that the teacher acquire competence in understanding ethical, political, economic, social, ecological and cultural problems. But, the teacher must go beyond this to create a classroom where students learn about and experience love, compassion and justice.

Palmer (1993) claims, "to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced" (p. 69). This space can be a physical space of a particular place. It may also be a relational space where the student is squeezed, confined or encouraged to expand beyond their present limitations to become more human. Within this concept of space, a teacher must also describe, model and allow the student to experience everyday life in God's world. Palmer claims,

> to study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn -- to study with such a teacher is to know the power of a learning space. (pp. 70-71)

Using collaborative strategies that rely on teamwork in posing, analyzing and solving problems, teachers translate learning into personal and societal situations. These might include students' learning to deal with peer conflict, racism and other injustices. Through all this, students are invited into a living, real relationship with the teacher, with other students and with the world outside the classroom.

Besides building community, Christian educators must promote and model reflection -- a rethinking again of old concepts in new ways. Educators must find ways to retell the story, for students to hear the story again -- for the first time. According to Stronks and Blomberg (1993),

> Teachers stimulate students to be reflective, to consider the meaning and implications of their actions and products. They help them be compassionate, creative, and responsible agents of change within and without the school. They help them experience that in God's kingdom the wolf and the lamb can feed together, that swords can be beaten into plowshares, that nations can blossom like lilies. Righteousness and justice, love and compassion, peace and joy -- those are the foundations for the pedagogy curriculum, and administration of a Christian school that models and nurtures responsive discipleship. (p. 37)

Again, Bibby and Posterski (1992) propose that "adults who work with young people will serve them well if they invite them to take time to pursue… reflection. The practice will give young people time to ponder some of the complicated decisions they face and perhaps foster an inner spirit that will generate both conviction and compassion in their day-to-day living" (p. 253). A well-known Catholic theologian, Henri Nouwen

(1981), suggests that reflection has a practical purpose and contributes to a creative present:

> In our chatty world, in which the word has lost its power to communicate, silence helps us to keep our mind and heart anchored in the future world and allows us to seek from there a creative and recreative word into the present world. (p. 48)

Obviously teachers cannot accomplish all these tasks alone; the students must evidence some commitment, reflection, discernment and hard work. Ultimately, the transforming power of God must work to transform people -- students and teachers alike.

The ideal goal for the Christian teacher is to achieve transcendent theoretical reflection and even practical application of classroom learning that has been devised to harmonize with a Christian worldview. Beyond these accomplishments the Christian teacher should strive to become a reflective and innovative educator. Teachers must craft their own response to God's world, using their own unique gifts to their best advantage. In using gifts to our greatest human potential Van Brummelen suggests that teachers become the agents of reconciliation and hope as God has intended (Van Brummelen & Elliot, 1997, p. 109). Van Til (1971) declares that the task of educators is "to teach those who belong to Christ the things that will encourage them to wish to belong to Christ with all their heart and mind. That is to say, it is our task to develop the minds and hearts of the children of the covenant of God's grace so that they will want to be self-conscious Christians as they develop to full maturity" (p. 1). This is no simple challenge. But, to teachers who are called to teach, according to Knight (1998), "teaching might be viewed as the art of loving God's children" (p. 209). In doing so, the Christian teacher must understand their teaching as a calling and recognize God's wisdom through which they "continue to work out (their) salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Although teachers are key to the success of Christian education, administrators are also indispensable. Fowler (1987) stresses that the organizational structure of Christian schools should enable the school to function freely in accordance with its God-given inner structure (p. 108). He also claims that administrators must "serve the living heart of the school." The heart of a school is people -- the teachers and pupils united in the teaching -- learning situation (p. 100). Administrators must not become bound to the goal of internal administrative efficiency, but be supportive and flexible in promoting the vision of Christian education within and among the teachers and students (p. 108). Beversluis (1971) draws the attention of educators and administrators to the bigger picture -- the vision of Christian education. In doing so he claims that a vision of Christian education needs to result in excellent course outlines and pedagogy, with clear aims towards the integration of a Christian perspective in all subject matters (p. 19). Serving real people, God's children, is the primary mandate for anyone in administration of Christian education.

Social Atmosphere and Relationships

For many years educational theorists have declared that the ultimate goal of education is to socialize children to be well-functioning and contributing members of society. Wolterstorff (1980) suggests that this process requires rules, roles and knowledge of societal expectations (p. 21). Christian parents, likewise, desire to socialize their children into the Christian community and toward responsible citizenship in the world. According to Groome (1980), "Christian faith is the expression of a Christian self. But if one's self-identity is shaped in large part by one's social and cultural context, then the process of coming to Christian self-identity, and thus lived Christian faith, requires a Christian social context. In other words, to come to be and remain Christian requires a process of socialization in the midst of a Christian faith community" (p. 108). According to Knight (1998) students are "educated to be witnesses to the love of God, regardless of who may employ them ... for the service to God and their neighbours ... for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven" (p. 240). Clearly there is a social component to this education that teaches students to live in relationship with the Creator and all that is created.

Christian educators recognize God, not society, as the ultimate authority. Christian education is not just for children to reason about moral matters such as love, justice and mercy, but to guide students in applying these concepts, in action, as responsible citizens before God and neighbour. According to Steensma (1971), the Christian educator must begin the education process by locating the student in relation to God, to others and to the created world. This starting point "is revealed in Scripture and accepted by faith" (p. 19). It is a religious presupposition. For, in these three essential relationships -- to God, others and the created world, humans find meaning for life.

Foremost, students must recognize their relationship to God who is Creator, Saviour and Sovereign God. In relationship to others, students must realize their task to serve their neighbour and preserve human dignity. In relationship to creation, students must recognize their responsibility as caretakers of the created earth. In formulating, articulating and modeling these relationships, educators interpret for the students "the meaning of cultural activity as a channel of response to God" (p. 45). By acting responsibly towards creation and fellow humans, we are showing our loving response to God.

To develop skills for living responsibly, in good relationship with each other, is a challenge for each human being. Steensma (1971) states "harmonious relationships will always be difficult to establish. Everyone in the educational setting has a responsibility to work for harmony. The person in the most strategic position to spread enthusiasm for harmony is the individual teacher" (p. 77). In research conducted on youth, Bibby and Posterski (1992) discovered some relational laws that all Christian educators should realize. For youth, the most important factor that draws them into active engagement in an activity is people. People are more important than the program or where the program takes place. Youth need time to build relationships. Also, the atmosphere and environment must be comfortable and inviting. The message must be clear – you are important and valuable and no matter who you are you are accepted (p. 256). Touch is an important way of connecting to students and youth; "the touch of a person is more powerful than the persuasion of an idea" (p. 257). Educators must give time and present opportunities for rapport to build and trust to grow. Learning to live as God's people takes time, for "Carrying out personal beliefs, establishing ethical codes, consolidating value systems, deciding whether or not to seek and know the God of the universe, and making spiritual decision-making are all serious matters" (p. 257). Educators desire to influence all students. However, influence is limited to only a few. The smaller the class, the more effective growth will occur due to influence (p. 257).

Finally, relationships are an end in themselves. In summarizing their study, these researchers conclude, "Youth today are compassionate creatures. They care deeply. And, they are ready to respond when they see they can make a difference" (p. 258). The purpose of Christian education is to develop healthy relationships with God, others and the world. Christian education is about making a difference in the way we live in community.

The teacher plays a key role in establishing a positive environment and healthy relationships within the school. Van Manen (1991) concurs with the importance of the teacher in the social context of education. He claims "Every teacher's classroom and every school is characterized by a certain mood. The question is not whether there should be an atmosphere, but what kind of atmosphere is conducive to pedagogical relations" (p. 184). Just as facts are never neutral, neither is the atmosphere of a place.

A Christian atmosphere seems to be an elusive concept to capture. Christian school students are exposed to other students and peers who also espouse Christian values passed on by parents, teachers and other adults in the community. There is, undoubtedly, some truth to the accusation that the atmosphere of a Christian school provides a protected environment for the student. But, is this not a good thing?

Meester, a parent interviewed by Vander Spruit (1999) gives an apt analogy to the idea of a Christian school being a shelter for children of Christian parents. "A shelter hides people from the storm. On the other hand, good teaching helps people to cope with the storm, understand the storm, reach out to others in the storm, use the storm, and see beyond the storm. That kind of teaching and learning takes time" (p. 26). The purpose of Christian education is not simply to hide the student from the real world. The purpose is to teach the student how to live in and contribute to the real world. This learning is a life-long process. It encompasses the years that students attend school and it engages them for the rest of their lives.

However, a Christian school should never be understood as a perfect place. There will be mistakes. Neither the students nor the teachers are perfect. The teachers carry the major responsibility of modelling and instructing in a Christian lifestyle. Just because students attend the Christian school does not mean that they have chosen to commit their lives to responsible discipleship. They are in these schools to learn and understand about this lifestyle. Hopefully, they will adopt this lifestyle and live out a Christian worldview in life. However, for now, they are learning and teachers continue to learn with them. Vander Spruit (1999) proposes that a Christian atmosphere should not be based on the ban on certain words but when students are taught to handle emotions vented in words (p.

94). It is more important to teach the students to internalize the meaning and purpose of a Christian lifestyle, than simply to prohibit bad words and negative actions.

Discipline in a Christian school should not be a set of do's and don'ts with consequences. As Christian educators, it is important to develop self-direction in students. Consequences should not be determined only by external rewards or punishments since the transfer to internalized positive behaviour is less likely. Wolterstorff (1980) advocates modelling as a more successful form of influence. "Modelling is indispensable for passing on to others many of the abilities we have acquired" (p. 57). Furthermore, much evidence in social psychology seems to indicate "people strongly tend to adopt beliefs and attitudes of a community in which they find love and acceptance. … Thus, the success of Christian education in a secularized context depends a great deal on whether the students experience a loving, sustaining community in school, home and church. When love is absent, the school will fail" (p. 60). Christian life is a way of living that must be internalized and meaningful to everyday life. This is best accomplished by modelling a life of love for God, others and the created world.

According to Beversluis (1971), the aim of Christian education is "to graduate students who are thoughtful and responsible" (p. 29). These students should be equipped to fit into the cultural community and be able to effect necessary change in their society, to work toward bringing life into line with discipleship to Christ. These students should realize the necessity of serving others and influencing reforms.

Discipleship seeks harmony between individuals. Christian schools should prize and nurture diversity; differences should be celebrated. The uniqueness of each person should be treasured. Within the body of Christ there are no inferior or superior members. Only with a diverse educational program, recognizing and celebrating individual differences, can a Christian school fulfill this mandate (p. 31). Beversluis declares, "learning goals and the curriculum of the Christian school must equip all of its students for living – human, cultural, Christian living, no matter what occupations or professions they eventually choose" (p. 31). This is Christian education – educating the student to live in and with society.

Research on Religious (*Christian*) Education Distinctiveness

Christian school education has been around for over a century, with the Dutch Calvinist day schools being prominent leaders in this field. Fostering the transformational worldview, originating from a Calvinist theological framework and predominantly within the Christian Reformed Church, these schools maintain a distinctive purpose and mission in the world. Over the years the effectiveness of these schools in promoting an alternative education has been deeply questioned and tentatively studied.

Even within *The Banner*, a denominational magazine for the Christian Reformed Church of America, this issue has been debated. Kuyvenhoven, a spokesperson for the denomination, noted in the October 10, 1988, editorial that Christian Reformed Church members have invested more time, energy and money in Christian education than in any other cause. Nevertheless, he suggested that in spite of this great commitment these schools were not observably different from public schools and should, therefore, be closed. He concluded his editorial by calling for a clear distinctiveness in Christian education: "If we continue to choose Christian schools, we expect of those who run the Christian school system to constantly review, refine, and revise their efforts. Let Christian schools be uniquely Christian – or fold" (p. 7).

Kuyvenhoven is not alone in his criticism and judgment regarding whether or not the Christian day schools are distinctive in nature. With these concerns in the thoughts of present day Christian educators, it is necessary that researchers determine the distinctiveness of Christian education. Only within the last few decades have educators begun to study more carefully and document their findings on this issue.

Several studies have been conducted within the area of private, religious school distinctiveness. Erickson (1963) measured the differential effects of public and private religious schooling on the religiousness of the child. Six, seven and eighth grade students who attended fundamentalist churches and/or day schools were studied. If students came from similar home and church backgrounds no significant differences were found in the religiousness of the child; the school was not found to impact religious behaviour.

Greeley and Rossi (1966) conducted a similar study. However, they added a time factor to the study, considering the long or short period of time that the student had attended the private, religious school. In this study, sacramental behaviour, doctrinal and ethical orthodoxy and knowledge of Catholicism were investigated. Adults who had attended Roman Catholic schools were compared with Catholics who attended public schools. Results indicated that the level of education and the religiousness of the parents were greater factors in developing these religious values than the Catholic schools. The impact of the Catholic school was only significant on students who had attended the Catholic school for an extended period of time. In both cases the schools had little effect on determining religious perspectives of the students.

A three year study was begun in 1983 by Parsons (1987), to specifically examine Protestant Christian schools. Visiting a wide variety of Christian schools across the United States, he attempted to study the Christian school movement to understand the impact of the Christian school on students. In all schools he found a strong emphasis on religious instruction, strict rules and policies, and wide academic diversity. The fundamentalist Christian school was now under scrutiny and researchers took up the challenge to understand its distinctiveness.

In 1986 Peshkin took a different approach to understanding Christian schools. He conducted a detailed study of one fundamentalist Christian school. This research has become well publicized, resulting in his book *God's Choice*. His work has raised questions for Christian education researchers. According to Deuink (1992), "Every student of the modern Christian-school movement should read *God's Choice*" (p. 87). Familiar with the Jewish faith, but an outsider to fundamentalist Christianity, Peshkin immersed himself in the life of this conservative Christian school for eighteen months, observing, interviewing and attending meetings and activities connected to the school. Peshkin summarized his work by examining the costs and benefits of this alternative Christian school to American education and society. He considered their many programs to promote student appearance, safety, moral standards, discipline and other traditional American values, as benefits. He found the Christian teacher work ethic attractive because dedicated teachers viewed teaching as a calling from God and evidenced great compassion and caring for students and the school. School graduates were inculcated with many positive personal qualities; they were loyal, honest, practical, reliable, hard-working students who accepted authority (p. 279).

However, in Peshkin's opinion, the costs were also noteworthy. The students seemed to lack intellectual vitality and artistic creativity, demonstrating a limited or narrow view of many controversial issues (p. 287). Ultimately, he identified the Christian schooling as divisive since it taught only one truth to the exclusion of all others. To him the most disturbing discovery was the lack of compromise, since they believed in absolutes that excluded other possibilities in life (p. 290).

In a discussion paper, Green (1992a) reflects on an interview with Peshkin (Green, 1992b). Green (1992a) claims that Peshkin advocates the kind of pluralism that allows this type of school to exist. Ironically, this very pluralism, prized by Americans living in a complex society, would be imperiled if the believers in this school held political power (p. 73). Peshkin suggests that the price Americans must pay for having these types of schools is eternal vigilance (p. 81). Peshkin's work was a comprehensive look at one type of Christian school with one particular worldview. Other Christian educators have continued to respond to this study.

For Christian educators, Peshkin's study is important. According to Deuink (1992), "his secular perspective will provide valuable insight to fundamentalist Christian educators concerning how others perceive their ministries" (p. 89). Also, DeBoer (1992) reacts to Peshkin's findings and conclusions. As a Christian educator who has spent his life encouraging Christian education within the Calvinist, transformational worldview, DeBoer expresses respect for the fundamentalist school studied by Peshkin because of their "total effort to make the vision match the practice" (p. 100).

The basic worldview of Peshkin's fundamentalist school is understood to be the separationist model (p. 100). DeBoer proposes that this Christian school and worldview are missing some foundational pieces for transformational Christian education. Within the transformational view, it is understood that everything in the world is part of God's world, which has been perverted by people and then redeemed by God's grace. This very culture and nature need to be restored and redeemed, given back to God. Students need to know the world in the light of God's revelation. In so doing, they may choose God.

DeBoer (1992) claims, "Rather than turning away from large chunks of nature and culture, Reformed (transformational) Christian education wants to turn toward nature and culture. We take our religious stand through culture" (p. 100). This is called "responsive discipleship" (p. 101). Akers (1994) quotes De Boer in defining this perspective on responsive discipleship, "…where before God, nature/culture, and other persons – is knowledgeable, critically reflective and contemplative; fully conscious, sensitive, and aware; alive, involved, and accountable" (p. 155). And, this call to responsive discipleship is foundational within transformational Christian education.

De Boer (1992) further explains that responsive discipleship is one in which "students are to be community builders, peace makers, justice seekers, earth keepers, and the like, who are, for example, not only globally aware but personally sensitive to both human weakness and human greatness" (p. 101). He further declares such goals as significantly important for the Christian school curriculum, a curriculum that goes beyond that of the fundamentalist school studied by Peshkin. Within this transformational tradition DeBoer suggests that students are taught to "respect authority and gradually take on a sense of responsibility and degrees of freedom that may significantly differ from the controlling, manipulating environment that Peshkin portrays…" (p. 101). Also, responsive discipleship means service to God and to the community. He states: "Perhaps the best forms of service are those that arise out of the subject material of the classes themselves. That way the acts of servanthood flow naturally, meaningfully, or consequentially from the materials being studied rather than being tacked on, and therefore are more likely to have a telling effect on the efforts of the school to nurture the dispositions of the students toward serving others in the name of the Lord" (p. 101). Peshkin's study activated Christian educators from different worldviews to analyze and re-evaluate their own perspectives and approach to Christian education.

In 1987, Potvin conducted an ethnographic and hermeneutic study to describe the experience of Christian religious education for two Alberta high school students attending a fundamentalist Christian school. Potvin wished to define the distinctiveness of Christian education as understood in the lives of these students. Results indicated that home and Christian school activities were greater influences on their lives than activities in church, youth groups or their community. Potvin contends that Christian education, "if it is to be workable, must be considerate of personal stories and visions" (p. 224). Participants in Christian education must encounter their own stories and visions.

Students and teachers must name and identify their actions, behaviour and understandings in the name of Christian education.

Potvin (1987) proposes that Christians need to re-interpret the Christian story and vision from their own experience, appropriating truths and letting the "story" affirm or rebut their own stories. To do this, dialogue is essential and total respect and love is required. To be transformed, the community needs to be open to transformation (pp. 224-228). The school, therefore, must be a "living response to the hope and vision of the kingdom of God" (p. 228).

With this view in mind, Potvin (1987) defines the distinctive elements of Christian education:

> Christian religious education is attending to and cooperating with God's activity within and surrounding the student. Christian religious education is a particular way of being with students that deliberately and in mutuality reveals God's activity historically and in the present, with the final goal as right relationship formation with God and with others. (pp. 230-231)

According to Potvin, real Christian education will be characterized by a personal and community response characterized by faith, hope and love. Thus, Potvin's results suggest that the social environment in a Christian school should clearly evidence a Christian atmosphere.

Erickson, McDonald and Manley-Casimir (1979) found that private religious schools do achieve distinctiveness in the area of social environment or the communal climate of the school. Erickson's (1989) studies later identified four important characteristics that make for a superior social school climate. He found that a high level of commitment from teachers, parents and students resulting in a high level of dedication, enthusiasm and participation was essential. A sense of community that involved mutual support and appreciation, trusting and caring relationships and a sense of justice and social togetherness were identified as important to producing satisfied community members. With a general consensus on goals, objectives and priorities for the school, more sharing of expectations and cooperation produced a better social environment. Finally, a community feeling of distinctiveness in vision and mission led to a higher level of social well-being among the members. Erickson was convinced that these factors were essential to achieve communal distinctiveness noted in private schools.

In Catholic schools these results were repeated. Judith Kleinfeld (1979) conducted a study involving Eskimo[2] youth in less than desirable conditions. She found that the success of the educational program in a remote village was attributed to relationships between participants whereby, "the intimacy between teachers and students seeped into the classroom and created an atmosphere of informality that belied the traditionalism of the arrangements" (p. 34). Erickson (1989) suggests that although technical aspects of the Catholic school are not comparable to the public schools, the advantages of the communal aspects are impressively distinctive (p. 111). Again, in 1990, Erickson indicated the strong community emphasis as important in many Catholic school studies. Based on about fifteen qualitative and quantitative studies, Erickson concluded, "the accomplishments of the Catholic school, including its religious influence on students, are attributable primarily to the qualities of the communal system" (p. 1). Throughout these results, social climate is clearly an indication of distinctiveness in religious education.

Further studies were conducted which support Erickson's findings on the importance of the social climate in schools. In 1989, Moes and McCarthy conducted a federally-funded study of one hundred twenty three independent secondary schools. Results indicate that the personal attention of the teachers toward the students, within a warm accepting environment with few discipline problems, made for a most successful school. The researchers surmised that effective education must include a strong sense of community among the members. After extensive research, Erickson (1989) concluded "most current educational reforms are doomed to fail, since they do not address at all, or do not address realistically, the communal problems that lie at the root of much school failure today" (p. 151). Erickson continues to suggest that although it is important to pay attention to revising curriculum, improving teacher training and increasing time spent on basic instruction (p. 151), it is essential that schools develop a powerful communal system.

According to Andersen (1995) the distinctiveness of a Christian school is in the relationships and atmosphere of the school. Andersen suggests that a Christ-centered education will foster Christian growth in the individual and the community. This growth will be a process towards transformation; it will not be instantaneous but will occur over time. This transformation will involve knowledge, emotions and action of the individual. A Christ-centered curriculum will attempt to understand and relate all of life within the context and interpretation of God's master plan. Finally, the social environment will involve deepening personal relationships and modelling a Christ-like life (pp. 7-9). The Christ centeredness of relationship and atmosphere is significant and is an ideal or goal to which Christian educators strive.

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[2] I realize that the word "Eskimo" is no longer considered an appropriate reference to Aboriginal peoples in Canada. However, "Eskimo" is the word used in Kleinfeld's (1979) study to designate Aboriginals.

An ongoing criticism of public education is that moral standards have declined. Thus, some Christian parents advocate on behalf of Christian education whereby Christian schools may implicitly and explicitly reinforce and foster moral Christian values in students. Nevertheless, this moral decline has been noted within most groups in society, including the Christian community. Scott (1999) attempted to define respect within the socio-moral atmosphere of three Christian schools. Teacher displays of respect toward students, student displays of respect toward teachers and student displays of respect toward peers were studied.

The results of this study confirmed the problems suggested by other researchers and educators in that values are easier to identify than to define. From this study, a need for formalized character-based curriculum at these schools was identified. Clearly a gap exists between what teachers and students understand as respectful behaviour. According to Scott (1999), "this gap indicates that respect has received little formal treatment within the curriculum since it is assumed that a standardized curriculum would increase levels of agreement between teachers and students because of their exposure to common experiences" (p. 48).

As a result of this study, curriculum strategies may be designed to teach respect. This may include providing models of respect through literature and history, developing classroom rules and procedures requiring respect and designing slogans to remind students to act respectfully (pp. 49-50). In determining the distinctiveness of a Christian education, educators need to define and determine respect as an important consideration for a healthy Christian atmosphere. This, of course, is complicated by the realization that defining respect is also problematic.

Defining respect or determining values to be appropriated within an educational setting is unique to each school culture. Harris (1993) describes a study conducted to portray cultural norms and the value orientation of a Jewish day school. Without a doubt, educators are aware that each school has a unique culture. This culture is credited with giving meaning to the educational process (p. 187). Harris reiterates the idea that "educational institutions are value-bound enterprises" (p. 210). These values are the basic beliefs shared, practiced and promoted by teachers, administrators, students and parents. These values set the tone or the "worldview" of the school. Thus, Christian educators are inextricably bound to their social environment.

The cultural values of the school will shape the values of the people in it, affecting student performance, attendance, outcomes and behaviour. According to the Harris study, administration and teachers shape the school's culture through their daily actions, attitudes and decisions (Harris, 1993, p. 211). Ultimately, school leaders and teachers give meaning to the values inherent in the Christian school; these people are major participants in producing distinctiveness in a school.

Thus far the bulk of educational research into Christian schools has involved private schools and Catholic schools. Less research has been done on Calvinist, transformational schools that are affiliated with Christian Schools International, of which Edmonton Christian School is a member. However, in 1986, Van Brummelen analyzed this Calvinist school system. His intent was to enlighten the reader regarding "the interaction of religion, ethnicity, and education as this came to expression in the North American Dutch Calvinist community" (p. xi). His conclusions were not overly complementary. He noted that the Kuyperian, cultural transformational goal of these schools often decreased over time. Supporters generally accepted the prevailing worldview of the American dream while attempting to maintain Calvinist doctrines and moral purity. The rhetoric of Christian education became just that, rhetoric. The curriculum, although intending to reflect a Christian perspective in all areas of study, closely resembled that of the public schools except for Bible classes or religious study classes. In many ways the Calvinist Christian schools were more representative of the Catholic schools in practice. They were identifiable both by their religious exercises and their Biblical studies courses, whereas the rest of the curriculum was similar to the public school (p. 279).

Although some positive developments were noted, Van Brummelen and other Christian educators of a similar worldview were discouraged with the limited degree of distinctiveness found in the curriculum and instruction in these Christian schools. Van Brummelen concludes "first and foremost, the school movement needs to define more sharply how its Christian worldview determines the school's curricular and instructional framework" (p. 291). With this worldview focusing on transforming culture, rather than conforming to culture, he advocated change and renewal in Christian education so that the distinctiveness of the Christian perspective is more obvious in all areas of Christian education.

But, what does it mean to have, in practice, a distinctive Christian education? In 1991, Hoeksema, a principal and educator of a Christian school in Michigan, conducted a case study of Dutch Calvinist School distinctiveness. Within his study he examined Dutch Calvinist Christian schools affiliated with Christian Schools International (CSI). He specifically asked what characteristics distinguished two similarly situated Christian high schools from public and other private schools. His focus was on curricular and communal distinctiveness. After collecting data, he concluded that the results were consistent in both schools. He interpreted the findings and concluded, "The claim of a distinctive curriculum that fully integrated faith and learning was without observational support" (p. x). Also, like the research of Van Brummelen (1986), the study found that "the Christian school curriculum closely resembled that of public schools except for Bible and religious studies classes, and consequently lacked any distinctiveness" (p. x). Results clearly indicated that both schools evidenced a strong "communal distinctiveness that permeated every area of school life" (p. x). This was obvious in the "remarkable consensus of purpose, a significant commitment to a central value system, a cohesion between the home and school, and an infectious affection between teachers and students that make education effective and meaningful" (p. x). His conclusion was not surprising considering previous research emphasizing social climate as an important distinctive to private and religious schools.

Likewise, Hull (1993) conducted a study to determine if the ideals of reformed Christian education (Calvinist, transformational worldview) are in fact a reality in the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS). The alternative status of these Christian schools is attributed to three factors: a Reformed perspective of Christian education, the promotion of biblical morals and standards that produce a healthy Christian environment, and the culture of the school that is conducive to learning. Upon studying eleven OACS high schools, Hull concluded that the goals and vision of these schools did indeed reflect the transforming vision of the Reformed/Calvinist tradition. The teachers, principals and students were committed to this vision. However, little transformation occurred in organizational structure, curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. There was a Christian ethic, practice and spirituality but the practice of a Christian mind was questionable (p. 119).

Hull remains convinced "that Christian education which is not characterized by a distinctive structure will not be a radical alternative to modernity" (p. 80). This means that Christian education "requires distinctive goals and an organizational structure, a curriculum, a pedagogy, and an evaluation model that are compatible with a uniquely Christian way of thinking and living" (p. 212). Clearly the distinctiveness of Christian education must extend beyond the social environment and mean more than simply a school where there are Christian teachers and staff educating students.

In reviewing studies that attempt to determine the distinctiveness of Christian schools, it becomes obvious that identifying factors that contribute to the distinctiveness of a Christian school is not an easy task. How does one know when they have found a Christian school? Christian educators continually ask this question: What makes a particular school a Christian school? Badley, Belcher, Crick, Hanson, Hull, Pedersen, Roodnick and Sandsmark (1998) discuss what may be considered identifying characteristics of a Christian school. These writers respond from their unique perspectives, situated in six countries around the world and from a range of Christian traditions. They are involved in a discussion to consider what aspects or factors of schooling may be judged to be Christian and to specify the criteria by which such judgments are determined.

Badley (Badley et al., 1998) suggests that semantics becomes a problem in identifying the "Christian-ness" of an educational program. What one person understands by one word may not be the same as another person. He considers a continuum as a means for classifying a Christian school and then rejects this notion. Can one school be "more Christian" than another? Maybe a starburst is a better description, whereby the criteria are all over the place, depending on the view of the Christian educators making the judgments (p. 40).

Sandsmark (Badley et al., 1998) responds to Badley, suggesting a matrix might be a means of systematically evaluating the Christian-ness of a school. However, she finds this too mathematical. She suggests that there is a difference between the quantity or amount of something being measured and the quality or degree of achievement in any characteristic. According to Sandsmark, "Evaluating the Christian-ness of a school is probably going to be a simplification " (p. 41) dependent on a number of complex factors. Hull (Badley et al., 1998) enters the discussion to propose that the relationship between faith and learning may be the pivotal point. Faith integration in a school may be at a small level rather than an encompassing integration involving the "atmosphere, moral character development, foundational perspectives, and, finally, worldview" (p. 43). He challenges educators to consider the gap between the vision and practice of Christian education.

In judging what aspects of a school make for a Christian school, Christian educators Hull, Pedersen and Sandsmark (Badley et al., 1998) offer suggestions. Sandsmark proposes four key factors: the visible faith of the staff and their professionalism, the aim or purpose of the school as known in theory and practice, the actual teaching of Christianity either explicitly or implicitly, and the relevance of the curriculum for helping students live in God's world (p. 43). She feels there are other less important, but still relevant, factors such as assessment and teaching methods, the school organization and administrative routines (p. 44).

Pedersen (Badley et al., 1998) does not consider the faith of staff to be the top priority in determining the Christian-ness of the school (p. 44). A "good teacher" is one who "brings the pupils into contact with the good and constructive parts of reality and who excludes (or guards against) the evil and destructive parts" (p. 44). Finally, a

Christian school will be determined *Christian* more in practice than in what is formally written in the form of goals or vision (p. 45). Hull suggests that a school may be Christian when it offers a "Christian education" rather than just "Christians educating" or "Christianity and education" (p. 45). He proposes that Christian teachers and a Christian environment are essential components of a Christian school. But, also "a vision that guides the integration of faith and learning" (p. 45) is needed in order to transform theory into practice.

Several Christian educators have attempted to propose criteria for judging what makes a Christian school. Crick, Belcher, Hanson and Pedersen (Badley et al., 1998) enter this discussion, challenged by the complexity of the issues. Crick reminds us that each school and group of people has their own culture that deeply influences their practice. However, she claims that "if a group of teachers are deeply committed to Christ, participating in the canon of scripture as those for whom everything is at stake; if they are also very good teachers who are able to grow in their task, reflecting on their practice intelligently and openly; and if they share an overarching aim for their practice to be moving in the direction of the kingdom of God in all its detail, then there will be a synergy, or a presence which makes it a deeply Christian school" (pp. 46-47).

Belcher (Badley et al., 1998) ultimately argues, "Christian education should transform and change us as we remain teachable by the Spirit of God and become educational thinkers and shapers" (p. 47). Truly Christian education will not require criteria for judging, our students will simply become more like Jesus and they will change the world.

Hanson (Badley et al., 1998) proposes that the marks of a Christian school include "the knowledge of God, the exercise of justice, and the giving of love, which reflects the depth of the holiness to which we are called" (p. 47). Since faith is to be lived deeply and embodied in our beings, this same commitment and response must extend to experiences of school. To determine the distinctiveness of a Christian school could mean hearing "the way in which the story is experienced by students and the way in which it is told" (p. 47). According to Hanson, criteria such as genuineness, order and coherence, engagement, alertness, insight, openness, responsibility, life and faithfulness may be factors to consider in these judgments (pp. 47-48). In this way we are judging the experience of the Christian faith as determined by participants.

Pedersen (Badley et al., 1998) encourages educators to consider the theological perspective or the denominational framework that influences the distinctiveness of a particular Christian school. Because Christianity is personal and spiritual, schools cannot be Christian. But, there may be specific characteristics of a school that make it a Christian school. God has designed people and given them the task of designing Christian schools (pp. 48-49). We need to be reminded that our individual, theological standpoint influences our educational thinking and directs our understanding and judgments of how a Christian may be considered distinctive.

Nonetheless, we can see that there are numerous arguments and discussions regarding Christian education. They are fraught with many contingencies and many perspectives. Although some may claim to have the definitive answer, this is not possible. The issues are too complex. However, one may claim that Christian education, to be Christian education, must be distinctively Christian.

Recently, Hull (2000) again addressed the criteria for a distinctive Christian education. He believes that Christian schools do not implement a Christian education, if that means "a distinctive, biblical model of education" (p. 1). He also claims "we really do not know what [Christian education] looks like" (p. 1). He refers to Kauffman's proposition that Christian school graduates "should be distinguishable from their public school counterparts." Kauffman did not find significantly distinguishable differences between the graduates of either educational system. However, Kauffman proposed that the Christian school graduates should be distinguishable as 'competent' and 'culturally maladjusted.' Competent students are "those who have discovered and developed their gifts for service in God's Kingdom." On the other hand, 'culturally maladjusted' Christian graduates should "reject the wisdom and priorities of their surrounding secular culture in favour of the wisdom and priorities expressed by their school's vision for Christian education." Graduates of Christian education should work toward a world "characterized by justice, compassion and moral integrity" (Hull, 2000, p. 3).

Hull (2000) also claims that a Christian model of education would include goals, curriculum, pedagogy, student evaluation and school structure that are part of the vision for Christian education. Instead of achieving Christian education in all these areas, Hull claims "Christian school educators aim for Christian education, but settle for Christians educating" (p. 3). Christian education refers to a "biblically based alternative model of education" whereas Christians educating is a "Christianity-enhanced public school brand of education" (p. 4). Christian teachers add to the educational experience of the students but do not significantly change the structure of the education.

Hull (2000) proposes that the distinctiveness of Christian education will be found in a biblical model of Christian education that transforms the very structure of schooling. This difference will be felt and seen in the organization of the school, the goals and vision adopted by the members, the curriculum taught from a Christian perspective with a pedagogy and student evaluation that is Christian in theory and practice. This is no small task for Christian educators engaged in Christian education.

In an attempt to determine distinguishing features of a Christian school, Van Brummelen (2000) has summed up much of this discussion by suggesting eleven criteria for a Christian school; these are critical components of a Christian school. The first four characteristics of Van Brummelen are also discussed in Burtcheal (1998). These criteria are general in nature, forming the foundational framework for a Christian school. Van Brummelen contends that a Christian school will not remain Christian unless each of the following characteristics is in place:

(1) It is crucial that Christian schools appoint and retain "God-fearing principals, teachers, and board members" (p. 26) who ensure that faith affects everything in the school.

(2) Christian teachers need to grapple consciously and consistently with "how the biblical themes of creation, fall, and redemption as a worldview" (p. 26) form the basis for life in our world and how these concepts affect the Christian classroom.

(3) Christian schools must maintain "a distinctively Christian community ethos" (p. 26) that contributes to student faith development.

(4) Finally, "constant prayer" (p. 26) is necessary so that educators, parents and students are lead by God and stay on task in their duty of Christian education.

Beyond these four critical components of a Christian school, Van Brummelen (2000) proposes seven more distinguishing elements or "core values." These features are identified as vital components of a Christian school and they are worthy of further investigation:

(1) A Christian school "must recognize itself as an 'annex' of Christ's church." In so doing it must

> uphold that personal repentance and regeneration are essential for salvation… proclaim that a call for the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life forms an integral part of the life of believers… show students that God calls them to be a witness to the world and 'salt and light' in culture, even when that leads to unpopularity or persecution… demonstrate that members of the school community must not conform to the pattern of this world, but exemplify biblical holiness… prepare persons who represent Jesus Christ as they penetrate culture. (p. 26)

(2) A Christian school must obey the authority of Scripture, professing the full truth and authority of the Bible. Board members, administrators and teachers must ensure that course content, teaching strategies, school policies, procedures and human relationships are biblically based.

(3) Also, learning in a Christian school must be faith-based and faith-affirming. Faith-based begins with faith in God, realizing that God is the foundation for all human activity. Faith-affirming learning lifts up our learning to faith by encouraging students to consider the Christian worldview. Especially with older students, this means teaching the Christian tradition and fairly representing other viewpoints while holding up God's Word as the standard for life and learning.

(4) Christian schools need to have a transformational impact. Teachers, parents and students are called to influence individuals and the culture in which they live, upholding biblical principles as the people of God while explaining, demonstrating and modeling love for God, each other and the world.

(5) A Christian school must strive for excellence in every area of life. This means excellence in academics and athletics, spirituality and personal maturity, and the ability to live and function within a community.

(6) Leadership in a Christian school is to be servant leadership, a way of life

modeled by Jesus. Within the school, board members, administrators, teachers and parents are a team, sharing in struggles, decisions and celebrations. In this way, "serving and leading merge and complement one another" (p. 28) so that God is honoured.

(7) Finally, discipling happens through community engaging in "responsive discipleship." All students use their God-given talents to develop their unique potential (Matthew 25:14-30). Students learn to share joys and burdens (Romans 12:3-8), while promoting God's peace and justice that bring healing to a broken world (Luke 1:51-53). According to Van Brummelen (2000) the whole faculty and staff of Trinity Western University are instrumental in helping define these components as essential to a Christian school maintaining its Christian distinctiveness.

After numerous studies and discussions engaged in by Christian educators, it is obvious how complex is the issue of distinctiveness in Christian education. Although these Christian educators do not always agree with each other, as Badley (Badley et al, 1998) suggests, "their disagreement nevertheless enriches our thinking about Christian schools" (p. 48). Clearly, the journey toward Christian education is challenging. Achieving distinctiveness in Christian education is a life-long process. If Christian education is more then simply Christians educating, it remains important for educators to conduct research and propose ways and means to institute these deep, structural changes. However, one must first determine what Christian education means for a particular school and culture. Articulating the goals and vision of Christian education is important. Putting these values into practice is essential. Recognizing that the task is large, one can only focus on a small part of the journey at one time. Toward a Christian education is an apt description for the task facing Christian educators.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Overview of the Study

In this chapter I present a comprehensive review of the various research methods used and the rational behind a case study approach to this study. Qualitative and quantitative data are extracted from several research instruments. The reasons for the adoption of specific research instruments, the research process itself and the various instruments -- questionnaires, rating scale surveys, interviews and focus group -- are important considerations in determining the overall reliability, validity and usefulness of these findings. Using a large and varied sample, I reveal how descriptive results were obtained. Through personal reflection, interpretation and analysis of the data I conclude my research by stating personal opinions based on the results collected.

This case study of Christian education at Edmonton Christian School incorporates features from both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Hathaway (1995) recounts historical debates "over the degree to which quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined" (p. 538). I tend to favour a pragmatic belief that quantitative and qualitative research practices inform each other throughout the process. The combination of these approaches serves to complement the results, rather than deter from the findings. In fact, deconstructing old ways of doing research is encouraged in this post- modern world. Various researchers (Clandinin, 1990; Hathway, 1995; Hermes, 1998; Lather, 1992; Van Manen, 1992; Bishop, 1998; St. Pierre, 1997) provide many different ideas and possible ways to go about researching these questions. Making a choice between quantitative or qualitative inquiry, as Hathaway (1995) quotes Allender, tenders the possibility that "to a significant extent, we choose our world view" (p. 557). I do not believe any one method will suffice; thus, I used different approaches, a triangulation of methods (Flick, 1988).

Methods of Study

Since I am already present within the research situation, a qualitative approach has been paramount in my research. Hathaway (1995) quotes Jacob, "Qualitative research has been characterized as emphasizing the importance of conducting research in a natural setting, as assuming the importance of understanding participants' perspectives, and as assuming that it is important for researchers subjectively and emphatically to know the perspectives of the participants" (p. 544).

Hathaway (1995) also quotes McCracken, "It is drawing on their [researchers'] understanding of how they themselves see and experience the world that they can supplement and interpret the data they generate" (p. 545). One disadvantage to this approach, however, may be the inability to generalize the findings because "reality is a constructed concept and a researcher's interpretation is also a constructed part of the reality observed. Reality for those being studied is different for everyone in the researcher's field of vision" (p. 545). Yet, my situation may also allow more open and honest responses from the participants. They know me already; as the researcher, I do not have to begin to build their trust. Situated within this research context, I already have a significant, personal understanding of the school system and the assumed Christian perspective or worldview.

As a general framework for my research I conducted a case study on Edmonton Christian School as a Christian school. Stake (1995) defines case study as the "study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Also, "the case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing" (p. 2). Louis Smith is quoted as defining "the case as a 'bounded system' drawing attention to it as an object rather than a process" (Stake, 1995, p. 2). People and programs make great material for a case study. According to M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996), "researchers generally do case studies for one of three purposes: to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, or to evaluate the phenomenon" (p. 549).

This study involves some aspect of each purpose usually attributed to case study research. However, the focus of my research is on describing Christian aspects of Edmonton Christian School. Through anecdotal comments, stories and numerous examples, I describe parent, teacher and student perceptions and feelings of how this school is oriented to a Christian worldview. It is considered common for the researcher to "create a thick description of the phenomenon being evaluated and identify salient constructs, themes, and patterns" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 551). This analysis appears to fit my research. I received "thick descriptions" (p. 551) of these perceptions. "Thick description is not complexities objectively described; it is the particular perceptions of the actors" (Stake, 1995, p. 42). Sometimes these descriptions took the form of stories, but the participants had a choice as to how they wished to convey their ideas to me.

At the same time, I expected some elements of evaluation in the analysis and interpretation of the study. Case study research, for the purpose of evaluation, is becoming quite popular (Gall et al., 1996) "because educational programs that receive government funding are required to undergo formal evaluation" (p. 551). I searched for patterns or themes within the data to determine those features that make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. Stake (1995) suggests, "All research is a search for patterns, for consistencies" (p. 44). From the rating scales on the survey and the qualitative questions in both the survey and interviews, I described what features of education at this school provide a Christian education. After my own interpretation of the results, a focus group discussion was held. In this situation I attempted to elicit from focus group participants their understanding or interpretation of the results I had collected, on what it is that makes Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. In this manner I evaluated Christian education as experienced by the participants at this particular school. Again, a triangulation of purposes for case study research is evident.

Although my study touches various other formal types of research, I did not expect my research to reach the refined product that any of these traditional forms of research suggest. There were elements in my case study of phenomenology. I worked "to gather other people's experiences" (Van Manen, 1992, p. 62). I collected these experiences in the form of stories written on the survey or shared in interviews. Also, I engaged the participants in personal reflection of those experiences. After transcribing the themes found in individual interview results, I invited the participants to respond to my written transcripts. M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) call this "member checking"(p. 575). This "is the process of having these individuals review statements made in the researcher's report for accuracy and completeness" (p. 575). These responses and even new reflections resulted in minor changes to the data according to the participant's perceptions and newly conceived understandings. These revisions were mostly additions of information or explanations for a certain point that the interviewee felt still needed to be counted. At no time was the data changed in basic content, although clarification and minor personal information was added or revised. I did not expect my research to reach the goal of the phenomenologist who seeks to discover the "essential nature" of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1992, p. 62).

There were also ethnographic components to my study, similar to those evidenced in John van Maanen's work (1988). I looked at the specific features in a given culture and searched for patterns within those features. The final results provided some understanding of this particular culture, even though the readers do not directly experience this culture (Gall et al., 1996, p. 607). Again, only some elements of an ethnographic study were present in this case study.

Also, the narrative approach to research was present in small amounts, but not in the refined form typical of the narrative inquirer (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquirer's claim that "the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world… educational and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories… humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). Also, "Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations." (p. 3).

This narrative inquiry partially resembles what I attempted to do. I looked at lived experiences from the point of telling the narrative. I asked participants for their stories, a telling of the self, not seeking to inquire about others. I also worked to find ways to tell my own story in the experiences that I encountered within this project and from within this particular environment.

I listened to participant's stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that this is important for participants to have the time and space in which to be heard. For too long the researcher's voice has been the only one heard. As researcher, I recognize the relationship in which both voices are heard. "Narrative inquiry is… a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and re-storying as the research proceeds" (p. 4). I anticipated that everyday actions, situations and events of life in the school would be heard as narratives, describing this life. My research included a collection of stories from the parents, teachers and students that helped determine what features make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school.

This case study approach included strong hermeneutic elements. Hermeneutics or interpretation (Gall et al., 1996) "has come to refer to the study of the process by which individuals arrive at the meaning of any text" (p. 630). Interpretation was necessary to understand what parents and teachers perceived as the features that make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. The qualitative collection of stories, experiences and reflections of the participants required careful interpretation. And, the interaction of the focus group, in the final stages of the data analysis, led to an interesting discovery that ultimately confirmed my own findings and interpretations. Aspects of my research involved interpretive inquiry, but these were not to the extent that interpretive researchers aspire (Ellis, 1998).

Qualitative data collection occurred mostly from the surveys and interviews. A collection of stories from parents, teachers and students helped determine features of school life that make ECS a Christian school. Essentially, my study was a case study -- a triangulation of many research constructs.

Initial Exploration

I grounded this research within the community of Edmonton Christian School. In the initial stages my research question and the overall structure of the research process was discussed with the Principal, an Edmonton Christian School Board member and several other school administrators and interested persons. Considering the recent re-structuring of the Edmonton Christian School Society for Education, the re-evaluation of the mission statement and the renewing of the vision statement, a re-description of what makes this school a Christian school was a legitimate and timely task.

It was essential that survey and interview questions most effectively asked parents, teachers and students how they understand Edmonton Christian School to be a Christian School. For these reasons I involved several key people in discussing and perusing the survey and interview questions. These people were actively involved in the affairs of the school and interested in this project; some of these people comprised my focus group participants. In this way I hoped to have a most effective survey, providing both quantitative and qualitative data that maintained my personal interest and directed the research in ways that were beneficial to the school community.

Data Collection

The Surveys

My initial, large-scale data collection was a two-part survey engaging quantitative and qualitative research methods. The survey, as a quick means of gathering information from people, involved administering questionnaires or interviews. According to M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996), "questionnaires and interviews are used extensively in educational research to collect information that is not directly observable" (p. 288). These instruments are mostly used to elicit feelings, motivations, attitudes, accomplishments and experiences of individuals. Since the purpose of my research was to gather perceptions from the respondents as to what features make Edmonton Christian School a Christian School, the survey was a commendable instrument for data collection.

There were two parts to the written survey. The first part, the short answer section of the survey, emphasized qualitative research methods. The second part, the rating scale, provided information that was quantifiable. Both parts of the written survey allowed respondents to be in control of the data collection process. Respondents were given the chance to record written responses to each questionnaire item; they were able to fill out the questionnaire at their own convenience, respond to questions in any order, make marginal comments and even skip questions if they so chose (Gall et al., 1996, p. 289). The two-part questionnaire provided lots of valuable data in a short period of time.

The other survey instrument used in this study that complemented the questionnaire was the interview, a form of qualitative research. This is an effective technique for probing deeply into the respondents' opinions and feelings. Along with the questionnaires, I preferred the adaptability of an interview; it allows the researcher to follow up on an answer by asking another question to "obtain more information and clarify vague statements" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 289). During an interview, the researcher is generally in control of the response situation. A mutually agreed upon time and place are established and then the researcher controls the questions, pace and sequence to fit the circumstances of the situation (p. 289). As a member of this community I already had an established rapport essential to gaining even more personal information from an interview; some of the information collected would not likely have been produced in other forms of data collection. M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) refer to the work of Robert Yin, which recommends both questionnaire and interview techniques be used, if possible (p. 290). These instruments were effective in helping me understand the perceptions of the participants.

The sample.

To determine what makes Edmonton Christian School a Christian school, the sampling strategy for the survey was a complete distribution of surveys (Flick, 64) to the parents and teachers active in the Edmonton Christian school community in the 2000 - 2001 school year. According to M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996), "the general rule in quantitative research is to use the largest sample possible" (p. 229) because a large sample, rather than a small sample, is more representative of the whole population. However, in this case study, although the whole population is large it is not unreasonable to survey the complete population. Thus, I chose to provide all the parents and teachers the opportunity to have their voice heard.

The parent population size included 461 families. This was not unreasonable for the parent survey considering that I expected some surveys not to be returned. I wanted all families to have an opportunity to respond, if they so chose. All teaching staff, likewise, received a survey. The entire staff included 54 teachers, both full-time and part-time employees that worked at the three different campuses that make up the school. Some teachers received two surveys, a teacher survey and a parent survey, because they are also parents of children attending the school. Other teachers, not parents, just received the teacher survey.

The sampling of the student body was more limited. Due to the nature of the inquiry, I decided to limit the survey to a sampling of grade 8 through 12 students. A whole class, at each grade level, was chosen to receive the sample. Since students were randomly assigned to classes, the class itself was a random sample of the student population. I chose classes based on availability and the interest of the teacher to contribute to the collection of the surveys.

The student survey sample consisted of older students, approximately 150 in total. Initially one grade eight class at the Northeast campus, and one grade nine class at the

West campus were surveyed. Upon analysis of these results I decided to extent the survey to include two other junior high classes. I discovered that the results from one particular class had a very high negative response to a particular question; I wanted to determine if this response was a class issue, possibly based on a specific circumstance, or if in fact this response was typical of other students in the school. Thus, a grade eight class at West and the grade nine students at the Northeast campus were invited to participate in the survey. At the senior campus the student survey was also given to a grade ten, eleven and a grade twelve class.

These parents, teachers and students were the "population of interest" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996, 92). Fortunately, this large and complete sample was convenient and accessible (Flick, 1998, p. 93), contained within a small geographic location and easily accessed from within the school community. I wanted to survey as many people as possible involved in the education process at Edmonton Christian School. In this way I received as much complete information as is feasible, on this particular question, at this particular time, in the life of this school.

Edmonton Christian School has a school-wide system of communication with parents done via the students. Each week a newsletter is sent home to every family highlighting the previous week's special activities and announcing the pending activities for the coming week. The youngest child in every family is responsible for the delivery of the newsletter; also, the only child in a family must fulfill this mail service. Therefore, I had at my disposal a fairly quick and usually efficient means of communicating with parents. Needless to say, the students become more efficient message carriers if some incentive is connected to the task. Thus, the teachers played a vital role in encouraging, motivating and even rewarding students for the return of "the mail."

The questionnaire.

Immediately before the short-answer questionnaire was to be sent to all parents there was an announcement in the school newsletters briefly informing and alerting parents to the coming survey, due back in two weeks. According to M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) a most effective technique is for researchers to contact or inform their sample population of the coming survey (p. 299). This pre-contact was important in my research to identify my role as the researcher, briefly discuss the purpose of the study and request the cooperation of the parents by actively seeking the delivery of their survey. When the questionnaire was sent to all parents whose children were registered in the school for the 2000-2001 school year, the parents were ready and waiting. Some parents who did not receive the survey on the prescribed day phoned the school to investigate.

Two weeks later, after the short answer questionnaire was due to be returned the rating scale survey was sent out to the same population even though there were still some questionnaires coming in. Over the next few weeks numerous, coded surveys were returned to the school. All surveys had been coded in envelopes so that I could check off the school and family name before opening the envelope, removing the survey and discarding the envelope. This meant that I could follow up specific classes to remind teachers and parents to return the survey. Over the coming weeks reminders were noted in the weekly newsletters and teachers regularly encouraged their students.

The questionnaire included more open-ended questions, using the qualitative approach to research. This part of the survey was sent first and separated from the rating scale so that participant responses would not be influenced by other survey information. I was concerned that the specific rating scale statements might influence people or lead people to perceive I was searching for a certain type of information. I wanted people to respond with their own perceptions and "off the cuff" ideas and thoughts. The questionnaire package included a cover letter regarding the overall research project, some guidelines and explanations about the questionnaire and the questionnaire itself. Participants were encouraged to tell their stories, indicate personal experiences or the experiences of someone in their family and express opinions about issues. They could write as little or as much as they chose. It allowed participants some choice in conveying their perceptions and opinions. This survey information was vital in providing a direction for the rest of the study. Peterson, in Hathaway (1995), advocates an approach whereby you use "findings generated from one approach to generate research questions for the other" (p. 556). I hoped to generate results from the survey that would lead to more in-depth questions and focus in the interviews.

The rating scale survey.

Hathaway (1995) claims, "Quantitative research…also provides a 'general' picture of an institutional situation or academic department climate" (p. 555). In many ways this overall picture was what I hoped to gain from the quantitative part of the survey. According to Fraenkel & Wallen (1996) a descriptive survey is "not so much concerned with why the observed distribution exists as with what the distribution is" (p. 368). Using a descriptive, census survey the rating scale was distributed to the same population as the questionnaire survey. All the parents and teachers of Edmonton Christian School were surveyed concerning their attitudes, feelings and experiences regarding aspects of Christian education found at this school.

The rating scale was specifically created to measure the perceptions of parents and teachers concerning features that make ECS a Christian school. For this rating scale survey, I patterned a commonly used attitude scale in educational research, the Likert scale (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996, p. 129), useful in rating perceptions and opinions. This rating scale was an "attitude scale" (Gall & Borg, 1996) that allowed individuals to express a viewpoint or disposition toward a particular statement or belief. An affective component surveyed the individual's feelings about the particular idea being asked and a cognitive component inquired about the individual's beliefs or knowledge about the attitude or idea expressed. As well, the rating scale contained a behavioral component because it required individuals to act toward the idea expressed in the statement and choose a rating indicating their level of agreement with a particular attitude, event or situation (p. 273). Each statement was judged by the participant on a five-point scale from strongly agreeing to strongly disagreeing with the statement. The tabulated results provided patterns, indicating the degree to which participants believe certain aspects of life at Edmonton Christian School make this school a Christian school. For my purposes this was an effective measure, quantitatively complementing the questionnaire and the interviews.

Since no rating scale existed to meet my research needs, I created my own. Knowing the population to be surveyed, assuming certain constructs to be measured and reviewing related surveys and relevant literature, I generated questions from a variety of sources. Some questions came from my own experiences and thoughts about what features of school life might determine what makes Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. Other questions were adapted from various criteria and questions asked by informed researchers and academics in the field of Christian education (Badley et al., 1997; Hoeksema, 1991; Stronks & Blomburg, 1993). Finally, some survey statements were taken from the school's vision statement document (Appendix B), developed in 1998 and used as a means of showing how the school reveals its Christian perspective in teaching. These ideas were formatted into rating scale statements that attempted to elicit the perceptions of the participants.

Four categories were chosen: faith integration, relationships, academics and teachers at Edmonton Christian School. Each category had five affirmative statements that were judged by the participant on a five-point scale from strongly agreeing to strongly disagreeing with the statement. A final, open-ended question invited participants to respond in any way they chose, to show me their overall impression of the school. Upon my initial completion of the rating scale instrument, several administrators and involved community members perused the scale for completeness and viability as a measure of the respondents' perceptions.

The Interviews

The second major phase of my research involved qualitative inquiry in the form of recorded interviews (Hathaway, 1995). Initially I hoped to limit these interviews to six people: two parents, two teachers and two students. However, once I collected the questionnaire and rating scale surveys and considered the results, I felt I needed to interview more people. These additional interviews allowed me the opportunity to delve more deeply into particular issues that were exposed in the survey. Thus, I extended my limit of six to nine interviewees: three parents, three teachers and three students. I wanted to interview as many or as few participants, as would be necessary, to understand the respective, differing responses. Interviewees were those who indicated an interest; the questionnaire had a space for participants to sign their name to indicate their desire to be further involved in the research project by participating in an interview. Many parents, teachers and students were willing to be interviewed.

As a follow up to the results from the questionnaire and rating scale, I engaged in "purposive sampling" (Flick, 1998) as I sought participants to be interviewed. I sought patterns in the survey that would lead me to choose the appropriate type of sampling so that all views were heard. I deliberately searched for data that would be "extreme or deviant" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 231) to the majority of cases. I hoped to focus at least one interview in this direction. I wished to integrate a few cases, "as different as possible, to disclose the range of variation and differentiation" found in the survey sample (Flick, 1998, p. 70). However, there were no extreme cases, although there were differing opinions. Thus, based on findings from the survey, I chose "typical" case selections, whereby the interviewees made up the normative type of response found, albeit with interesting differences.

I deliberately perused the participants willing to be interviewed and made selections based on cases likely to be "information rich" (Gall et al, 1996, p. 218) with respect to the purpose of the study. I sought participants who appeared eager to participate. I chose some individuals whose survey responses contained certain information that left me with more questions and whose ideas I wished to investigate further. I explored the data for differing points of view and searched for participants with varying backgrounds or experiences. Because I knew some of the participants I attempted to interview people with different personalities. I was also cognitive of gender, age and denominational differences. Thus, I ultimately collected a broad overview of participants' perceptions regarding Christian education at Edmonton Christian School. From the interviews, I sought more in depth data and a deeper probing of the issues from what appeared to be fairly representative responses.

To this end I conducted mostly semi-structured to informal interviews. Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) claim that interviews are important ways for researchers to "check the accuracy of -- to verify or refute -- the impressions he or she has gained" with the purpose to "find out what is on their [the participants'] mind -- what they think or how they feel about something" (p. 447). Stake (1995) suggests, "much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is being observed by others" (p. 64). According to Patton,

> We cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time... We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. (p. 447)

Although structured interviews are designed to elicit specific answers, I was mostly informal in nature with the interview resembling casual conversations with the interviewee doing most of the talking. I had a prepared set of questions in case the interviewee needed to rely on me asking questions in order to talk about Christian education. In the interview I initially asked more semi-structured questions (Flick, 1998, p. 82) in the hope of eliciting specific responses regarding the interviewees understanding of Christian education and specifically Christian education as it relates to Edmonton Christian School. These questions were followed with open-ended questions in anticipation that the interviewee would freely answer (Flick, p. 94) and even deviate from the question, if he or she chose to do so.

Sometimes these open-ended questions encouraged a narrative response (Flick, p. 99), allowing people the freedom to express their perceptions in a way most comfortable to them. I anticipated hearing personal stories about experiences with Christian education at this school. Or, I hoped interview questions might invite the participants to describe what the experience of Christian education, at Edmonton Christian School, is like for them. The primary intent of the interviews was to "find out what people think and how the views of one individual compare with those of another" (Fraenkel & Wallen, p. 447).

The interview questions were of different types. I sought descriptions of the participants' experiences (Fraenkel & Wallen, 448). Feeling questions were asked to find out how the participants felt about certain issues. Emotional responses were encouraged to help me understand their experiences. I expected that a great deal of data would be sensory (St. Pierre, 1997) which would make the recording of the information a challenge. I was searching for themes and patterns in perspectives and opinions.

The Focus Group

Upon transcribing and analyzing the information obtained from the survey and interviews, I established and conducted a focus group (Flick, 1998). Flick quotes Morgan to explain that focus groups may be useful for "getting participants' interpretations of results from earlier studies" (p. 123).

Focus group members were very interested in this study. In order to facilitate an already existing group and to engage in intensive analysis of the results for the purpose of understanding how Edmonton Christian School could benefit from these findings, I chose the existing, elected Edmonton Christian School Board members as my focus group members. This included a mix of parents from each campus, elected to give direction and oversee the operation of Christian education at Edmonton Christian School. Administrators of all three campuses were also invited to participate in this analysis and discussion. Many of these Board members were parents who had completed the parent survey and the administrators had also completed the teacher and/or parent surveys. Without a doubt these people formed an intensely interested, representative population with a vested desire to enhance Christian education in this school.

Results from the research were shared with focus group members. Before the meeting, each member was sent a package of initial data to peruse on their own. When they came together as a group, I then invited in-depth interaction and conversations between members of the focus group and myself, the researcher. The goal was not to prove a point but to seek greater understanding of their interpretation of the results and what they perceived as implications of this research for Edmonton Christian School.

Research Analysis

Reflection, Description and Interpretation

In case study research, according to Stake (1995) "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations. Analysis essentially means taking something apart" (p. 71). In my particular case study, analysis means taking apart the perceptions and impressions of the participants to find meaningful themes and patterns. In effect, I was looking for descriptions found by searching for "salient, characteristic features of a case." (Gall et al, 1996, p. 548). This search involved interpreting responses of the participants and looking for meaning in repetition of the phenomena and quantitative results, while working to understand the individual's perception portrayed in the qualitative responses (Stake, p. 76). Because my personal interest was to study the phenomena of Christian education at Edmonton Christian School, my focus was toward a more direct interpretation, narrative description and personal reflection of the issues as they apply to this particular school and this unique community.

An important aspect of my analysis was interpretational in nature. According to M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) "interpretive analysis is the process of examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied" (p. 562). The interpretation of data helps a researcher code the data in a way that reveals patterns. It places a "structure of meaning on the data" (p. 569). For my study, content analysis meant developing categories of information, labeling these categories and defining the theme, pattern or phenomenon. To find salient categories, I had to study the questionnaire data carefully, identify significant phenomenon and then determine which phenomenon shared sufficient similarities that could be considered instances of the same concept" (p. 564). This concept then became a category for coding the content of the data.

From the questionnaire each created category was then labeled and briefly defined. M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) suggest this is an example of "grounded theory," whereby categories are decided directly from the data collected rather than from theories developed by other researchers (p. 565). These created categories are grounded in the particular set of data that was collected and "seek to explain the phenomena as well as to describe them" (p. 565). Thus, the emphasis on explanation makes the categories theoretical, even if they are purely descriptive (p. 568).

The analysis of the qualitative data was an intensive procedure. Using specific words or phrases and interpreting the meaning of certain segments of text, I coded the data, searching for patterns. A single segment sometimes provided various types of information that led to "multiple coding" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 566). Some information was also ambiguous, while some information was not codable in the present system but required revisions to the categories in order to code the new information. At the same time, according to B. Glaser and A. Strauss, quoted in M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996), some categories overlap. There was a "continual process of comparing segments in and across categories" (p. 566). At this point, it was important to continually compare and revise categories "until satisfactory closure (was) achieved" (p. 566). This revision involved clarifying the meaning of each category, creating sharp distinctions between categories and deciding which categories were most important to the study (p. 566).

Well before all the questionnaire data was coded, it was obvious that a saturation point had been reached. There was no new relevant data emerging to be added to the established categories and no new categories appeared to be necessary to account for any new data. The exhaustion of data made it clear that little more information of relevance would be gained from further engagement of data collection in the questionnaire form. I realized that my collected results were plentiful and an accurate portrayal of the population sampled.

A statistical representation was provided from the coded categories. The frequency of each code was calculated and the percentage of participants responding in this way was recorded. These "descriptive statistics" provided a more organized, numerical summary of the data.

The rating scale analysis, a form of quantitative analysis, was much easier. These "forced choice" answers (Gall et al, 1996, p. 304) were easily coded. I sought to determine the frequency of responses given to each statement, on a scale of one to five from strongly agreeing to strongly disagreeing. M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall suggest the "tendency for qualitative researchers to use statistical analysis as a supplement to interpretive analysis" (p. 168). In essence I used the rating scale to complement findings from the questionnaire and to numerically check the overall perception of the population concerning features that make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school.

A major component of my research was, also, reflective analysis (Gall et al., 1996). Initially, I reflected on findings from the questionnaire and rating scale and then used these results to formulate questions for the interviews. In part, the interviewees were also chosen because of information they provided on their surveys. According to M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) reflective analysis "primarily relies on intuition and judgment in order to portray or evaluate the phenomena being studied" (p. 570). Reflective analysis is largely subjective. M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) claim that reflective analysis is "ideally suited for thick description, but it also can lead to the discovery of constructs, themes and patterns" (p. 570).

The interviews provided another form of triangulation of data and analysis. Specifically, I sought stories, feelings and personal perceptions of what makes Edmonton Christian School a Christian place. Each set of interview questions was designed specifically with the interviewee in mind. Beginning with a few generic questions, I then moved to specific questions related to responses on their pre-assessed questionnaire. This more informal section of the interview allowed the discussion to flow in any direction. As a regular member of this school community I was in a unique place as researcher. Clearly rapport was already established with most interviewees and trust was there because of my role as staff member in the school. Being present in this situation on an on-going basis allowed me an understanding of the respondents' culture and language regarding Christian education. Knowing most of the interviewees placed me in a position to move discreetly and be sensitive to nonverbal information that was revealed in the interview process.

As researcher, I examined and re-examined all the data collected. In doing this analysis certain features or themes stood out. Stake (1995) suggests that the search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions" (p.78). I then attempted to understand these features by themselves and in relation to other data collected (Gall et al., 1996, p. 571).

Ultimately, I summarized the results and formed an analysis of what these findings potentially mean for Edmonton Christian School and for my own practice. Using elements of interpretive inquiry, narrative description and reflective analysis, I perused the data many times, each time asking different questions while searching for patterns and relationships. Answers to some questions gave rise to new questions, as I attempted to interpret and understand the data (Ellis, 2000).

However, I did not want to be the only one responsible for interpretation of the data. It was my hope that this study would present data that could inform and benefit this particular school. Thus, the focus group became a means to enlarge the interpretation beyond that of just the researcher. Within this focus group we engaged in interpretive analysis by "checking one's interpretation against plausible counter-interpretations; actively seeking and trying out a number of different perspectives or conceptual frameworks as sources of questions to guide the analysis; and searching the data for gaps, contradictions and inconsistencies that may call into question one's preferred interpretation" (Ellis, 2000). At this point, I expected hermeneutic inquiry to be the primary approach to understanding the data.

These discussions were meant to explore and synthesize the overall meaning of the research findings. I expected that these focus group reflections and responses might influence my own interpretations and result in changes to my understanding of the results, referred to as "uncoverings" (Ellis, 2000). Ultimately, whether my understanding was transformed or not, my goal was to share understandings. Indeed, the results of the focus group were interesting. I was able to reflect on my own interpretations of the data. I was challenged by the focus group members to present my research findings in the light of current literature and other studies conducted by other educators and researchers. Without a doubt I became convinced that my research findings were useful as a means of informing the Edmonton Christian School community about what makes this school a Christian school. Focus group members indicated that these research results could eventually lead to the development of policies and institutional practices or interventions that ensure that Edmonton Christian School is working toward a better practice of Christian education.

This research project extensively used both quantitative and qualitative methods. This triangulation provided a wide variety of useful data that helped me engage in large-scale reflexivity and interact with key people on an ongoing basis. I heard from a multiplicity of voices in a "research of praxis" (Lather, 1992). At the same time I recognized the difficulty inherent in having so many voices, with so many situations. The most intriguing and challenging data was information collected regarding the experiences of the participants, either from the qualitative survey questions or the open-ended interview questions. The personal nature of perceptions and understandings presented challenges in my project. However, based on the findings, I have tried to present a plausible, persuasive, coherent and comprehensive document that suggests what parents, teachers and students perceive are the features that make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school.

Case Study Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability are often considered problematic in case study research, and are issues in qualitative research. There are several reasons for this. Each researcher and each participant studied constructs his or her own reality. Also, if the researcher becomes the central focus, reflective and interpretive analysis is based on personal experience and intuition; alone, these are questionable forms of analysis to some researchers. Finally, in case study research, no inquiry process or type of knowledge has any authority over any other (Gall et al., 1996, p. 572). Researchers simply do not agree about how to assure valid, reliable knowledge (Gal et al., 1996 & Flick, 1998) in case study approaches to research analysis. Nevertheless, many researchers accept non-traditional forms of criteria and interpretive researchers often apply criteria of plausibility, authenticity, credibility and relevance as the hallmarks of a valid and reliable case study (Gall et al.).

According to M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996), the use of multiple methods of data collection for case studies is beneficial. A triangulation approach "helps to eliminate biases that might result from relying exclusively on any one data-collection method, source, analyst, or theory" (p. 574). By using "member checking," I increased the validity of my case study research. At the conclusion of each interview I transcribed the discussion in thoughts and ideas. I then presented each interviewee with a copy of this transcription and asked them to add, delete and respond. The multi-vocal character of this study enhanced the credibility since "case study interpretations are more credible if the researcher demonstrates openness to the possibility of multi-vocality" (p. 573).

All parents and teachers had the opportunity to be heard. Many students were surveyed and responded. Interviewees were representative of the data collected from the questionnaire and rating scale survey and the focus group allowed for more member-checking. Numerous opportunities were provided for people to respond to the research and findings. My data collection procedures and the interpretation process ensured a triangulation of methods that enhanced the validity of a case study approach.

Altheide and Johnson (Gal et al., 1996) suggest interpretive validity is maintained when the criteria of usefulness and contextual completeness is considered. They propose, "one way in which a case study can be useful is that it enlightens the individuals who read the report of its findings" (p. 572). In fact, my ultimate purpose was to provide relevant findings useful for Edmonton Christian School. These results may eventually result in policy or practice changes or simply be an affirmation of what makes this school a Christian school. On the other hand, my interpretations will be more credible for being set within a specific context.

Again, Altheide and Johnson (Gal et al., 1996) suggest contextual features useful in interpreting the meaning of the phenomena. Within my study these contextual features include the history, physical setting, environment, number of participants, activities, division of labor, significant events, members' perceptions and meanings and social rules, and basic patterns of order (p. 573). Results from various test instruments complement the findings in other data. Validation and verification occurred simultaneously as I moved from one analysis to another. All this leads to a "thick description" (Gal et al., p. 551), detailing what participants' perceive about Edmonton Christian School.

Often the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as detrimental to the credibility of the research findings. However, Peshkin (1988) offers an opposing view suggesting that researchers should systematically seek out their own subjectivity while their research is in progress, so that they can determine how their own thoughts and feelings are shaping their inquiry and research results. With these criteria in mind, my research design and methods provided ample room to attribute reliability and validity to the qualitative results.

Case Study Generalizations

Again, many researchers recognize that generalizing case study research is often problematic. However, some feel that case study findings can be generalized. M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall (1996) refer to comments by Wilson and Conbach. Wilson suggests that the responsibility of each reader or user of case study research is to determine the applicability of findings to their own situation (p. 578). Conbach argues that any generalization in the area of social science research should be considered only tentative until tested against the unique conditions of each situation (p. 579).

M. Gall, Borg and J. Gall suggest that research findings are more generalized if the researcher provides thick description of the participants and contexts, "so that readers who are interested in applying the findings can determine how similar they are to the situation of interest to them" (p. 579). According to Flick (1998), "Generalizability is not in every case the goal of a qualitative study" (p. 70). Stake (1995) reinforces this argument suggesting

> the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (p. 8)

Although it is desirable to generalize research results to other circumstances and similar situations, in qualitative case study research this should not always be the goal.

Also, reliability of this study depended somewhat on the reader's assessment of me as a research instrument. For this reason I revealed my personal story and theoretical biases. I have openly reflected upon my own analysis and interpretation. This openness allows readers to see similarities and contrasts in their own situation and therefore determine the generalization of this project to their own situation. To this end, I continually kept a journal of my own reflections and reactions to the findings from the survey and the data collected within the interviews and throughout focus group discussions. For my research I have conducted case study research to suggest particular features within Edmonton Christian School that point to the unique Christian nature of this place of education. Others may do the same in similar contexts and situations.

In summary, the information contained in this chapter indicates how qualitative and quantitative data have effectively produced reliable results. The questionnaires, rating scale surveys, interviews and focus group reflections all aided my understanding. Using a variety of instruments tested on parents, staff and students at Edmonton Christian School, I acquired descriptive results. Through personal reflection, interpretation and analysis of the data I present results, formulate opinions, and offer conclusions as to what features make this school a Christian school.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH THEMES, INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In this chapter I show evidence for the way I've categorized the global themes. These themes, or patterns, have developed from the participant responses to the questionnaire and are more extensively examined in chapter 7. A deliberate repetition of these themes occurs because I want readers to see how the interpretations are grounded in the responses of parents, teachers and students at Edmonton Christian School (ECS).

In portraying the participants' thoughts, I have used quotes to highlight specific word choices that the respondents have used. However, even when quotation marks are not used, I have tried to adopt the speaking style of the respondent as a way of representing the person's insights as validly as possible.

Overview of the Questionnaire

This chapter presents descriptive and numerical data collected from the questionnaire. Parents, teachers and students responded to questionnaires designed specifically for them. Throughout this chapter many quotations of excerpts are taken directly from the completed surveys. These descriptive comments, stories and opinions provide invaluable information for understanding the respondents' perceptions. From each sample an overview of the type of participant was also tabulated; this included the denominational representation, the representation of respondents per campus, the grade level of the students/children, the number of years affiliated with Edmonton Christian School and the believed understanding of what this school is all about. From the data collected, I interpreted the information and categorized it into themes. This process of interpretation resulted in personal reflections about what makes ECS a Christian school.

As a form of qualitative data, the questionnaires provided extensive information. These open-ended, short-answer questions required that participants reflect for themselves and present, in their own words, their analysis of what they believe makes ECS a Christian School. All parents, teachers and 150 junior and senior students were surveyed. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain a quick survey of people's first impressions.

Most parents completed their responses right on the questionnaire. Some wrote small to use all the space provided. However, a few parents re-typed the survey questions and sent very long, complete and often quite articulate responses. Some apologized for making me read so much but they felt quite passionate about this topic. Still others sent me copies of magazine articles that made reference to some area touched on in my study. Clearly, many parents wanted to have their voice heard on these issues.

Each group of surveys was then analyzed and interpreted to determine any major themes that may have surfaced. The number of people who indicated any particular response was presented as a percentage of the whole population. As well, the actual number of people who responded to each item was also recorded. These responses were then described according to the stories, examples and explanations given by the participants.

Finally, as researcher, I have reflected on these responses from my perspective as a member of the ECS community. As a newcomer to this Reformed worldview and as an educator who desires to improve my own practice of teaching and learning while providing helpful information to the ECS community, I comment, explain and elaborate on the findings.

Parent Participants

The first survey, the questionnaire (Appendix C), was sent to all families with children registered in the 2000-2001 academic school year. Of 461 families in the ECS system, 233 families responded to this short answer survey; this was a 51% return rate.

Three campuses were represented in the survey. Table 1 shows the parent representation on the returned questionnaire, from each campus. These figures are fairly representative of the overall population at the various campuses; West campus has the greatest population and the Senior High campus the least. It needs to be noted that many parents had students in the West or Northeast campus and also the Senior High campus; in these cases the parent response is recorded at the Northeast or West campus.

Table 1: Parent Representation by Campus

Campus	Returned Questionnaire: % of responses/campus	Returned Questionnaire: # of responses/campus
West campus	57	133
Northeast campus	30	70
Senior campus only	9	21

Parents with students in all divisions responded to the questionnaire. Of course some parents had children in more than one grade level. Understandably the primary, intermediate and junior high divisions were most strongly represented since there are two elementary/junior high campuses and only one senior high campus. Table 2 shows the percentage of parents, responding to the survey, whose children are in attendance in the various divisions.

Table 2: Parent Representation by Grade Division

Class Division	% of Parent Respondents Represented by Divisions	# of Parent Respondents Represented by Divisions
Primary (Grades K,1,2)	50	117
Intermediate (Grades 3,4,5)	41	96
Junior High (Grades 6,7,8)	42	98
Senior High (Grades 9,10,11)	28	65

Important to the survey results is the assumption that the parent population has some understanding of the workings of ECS. All respondents indicated their own perceptions of how familiar they felt about ECS. Some parents indicated two measures when they couldn't decide upon one. These multiple indications usually happened between the "very good" and "good" designations. When this occurred, I considered both measures in my calculations. Table 3 indicates the degree that parents feel they know ECS.

Table 3: Degree that Parents Claim Knowledge of ECS

Knowledge of ECS	Percentage of Parents	Number of Parents
Excellent	20	47
Very Good	48	112
Good	59	138
Fair	4	9

Of the questionnaires returned 92% were completed by parents who were not teachers while 8% were completed by parents who are also teachers. Of the surveys returned, 90% of the parents claim that their children unequivocally enjoy attending ECS. The other 10% suggest that sometimes their children enjoy it, but sometimes they have difficulties that make their school life a struggle and, therefore, less enjoyable.

Table 4: Parent Respondents' Denominational Affiliation

Parent Respondents Represented by Church Affiliation at ECS	% of Parents	# of Parents
Christian Reformed Church	73	170
Baptist Church	4	9
Pentecostal Church	4	9
Alliance Church	3	7
Catholic Church	2	5
Presbyterian Church	2	5
Lutheran Church	1	3
Other affiliation	10	23

When considering the worldview of this community, it is significant to note the denominational affiliation of families attending ECS. Over the years this school has been supported and guided by the worldview adhered to by the Christian Reformed Church of Canada. And, although people from other denominational backgrounds have been invited to participate in this community, Table 4 presents the denominational affiliation of the parent respondents as calculated according to responses given on the returned questionnaire. Clearly, the greatest majority of the respondents still claim a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) affiliation. Others belong to a variety of different denominations. The most common responses from non-CRC participants include: Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Alliance, Catholic and Lutheran. Others respondents, consisting of less than 1% of the population, noted affiliations with the Canadian Reformed Church, 7th Day Adventist Church, United Church and the Salvation Army Church. Some participants noted their denomination affiliation as Evangelical or Christian while some respondents did not identify any affiliation.

Responses from Parent Questionnaire: What makes ECS a Christian School?

Question 1: Why do you send your children to a Christian school?

Among the answers to this question there were a variety of reasons why parents chose Christian education. However, several important themes began to emerge as parents identified reasons for sending their children to ECS. Table 5 indicates the top eight responses identified by parent respondents. Some parents indicated more than one reason; all responses were tabulated in percentages and the actual number of parents responding.

Table 5: Reasons Parents Send their Children to a Christian School

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 233 Parents	%	#
Christian perspective taught at school is consistent with home beliefs.	95	221
Environment is caring and warm with good friendships for children.	51	119
Christian teachers are good role models for the students.	40	93
High academic standards are established.	15	35
A safe place where the children are less likely to be in danger.	13	30
Tradition: parents and possibly grandparents attended this school.	12	28
Smaller class sizes result in more individual attention for students.	6	14
Christian discipline that is firm and consistent.	4	9

Reasons for sending children to Edmonton Christian School (see Table 5).

Without a doubt the most obvious reason (95%) parent respondents send their children to a Christian school is so children will be educated about life and the world from a Christian perspective. Many parents also indicated that this Christian perspective is desired because it is consistent with the ideals and values of their home. One parent explained that the main reason for a Christian education was for their children "to understand what it means to be loved by God, to love God and to love neighbours." They believe children also need "to understand what it means that our world belongs to God and how stewardship fits into that context." The hope was that their children "understand what it means to do justice, be obedient to God and to act with compassion, while learning to discern in ways of entertainment, communication and making of relationships." Another parent expressed the desire that his/her children "increase their knowledge of the truth." Parents were confident that the lives of their children were founded on a solid foundation; their children were being taught to respect and value others.

Another parent also said that not only did he or she hope children gain "some understanding of God's presence in everything, every subject and everywhere, but also gain an understanding of their own purpose, identity and faith and that they will also bear fruits and praise God." One parent wrote: "The staff are our eyes and ears when we are not around. Therefore, they enforce standards that we also enforce at home. They help our children understand what it means to love God and be a Christian." Ultimately, the reason most parents at ECS choose to send their children to the Christian school is so children will receive a Christian perspective on life and learning.

The second most important reason that 51% of the parents send their children to a Christian school is for the caring and warm community. These parents indicated that they felt this Christian community is a safe and comfortable environment. It was desirable that friends attended the same school and church; some parents found this factor important in their children's relationships. Many felt that the school community, including parents, teachers and even students, look out for each other and care for each other. This sense of community was also noted among families. One parent declared that the community members "look out for each other when it really counts, in times of loneliness, fear, confusion and difficulty." This togetherness and community spirit was considered an essential ingredient for a Christian school.

The third reason parents selected Edmonton Christian School was the perception that the Christian teachers talk about the Christian faith and live accordingly. While approximately 95% of the parent respondents saw the Christian perspective in life and learning as the number one reason why parents send their children to a Christian school, 40% went a step further by acknowledging that the people who make this happen are the teachers. Without the influence and teaching of the Christian teachers, the Christian perspective would be absent. One parent claimed that teachers help "our children learn what it means to be a Christian and to understand more fully the wonders of God's creation." Another parent indicated that the teachers "go the extra mile to meet the social, academic and behaviour needs of the students." The value of the teacher as the one who "sets the tone for learning" was clearly articulated in the survey, while parents also indicated that they "expect the teachers to teach with a Christian perspective, thus giving a child a Christ-centered education."

The Christian perspective, community environment and the affect of Christian teachers were the most noteworthy reasons identified by most parent respondents as reasons for sending their children to a Christian school. However, some other factors were identified. Although they are rated, overall, to be of much less importance, they are still worth noting. Some parents felt that high academic standards were important factors. These parents often commented on the government achievement tests as criteria to determine the academic standards of the school; they felt intellectual learning was an important consideration.

Other parents commented on the desire for a school that is seen as a safe place, where the children are less likely to be in danger. Parents expressed two meanings of the word "safe." Some parents perceived the need for safety from physical danger. They felt comforted when their children are at the Christian school because they know the children are cared for, "I don't have to worry when they go to school." Another parent expressed a slightly different perspective on the meaning of "safety" by claiming that their children attend the Christian school because we need to "protect our children from the real world as long as possible." Several parents expressed the view that a Christian school was less likely to have exposure to "immoral, negative, and pluralistic" views and values. Concern for their children's safety is important and was expected to be a part of a Christian school.

Only a few parent respondents indicated tradition as a factor in their choice. Some parents indicated that they had been educated in the same Christian school system, albeit in different cities. Other parents mentioned that their parents were involved in the founding of these schools and even taught in these schools. This theme was elaborated upon when one family claimed that, basically, their wish was to give their children "something of the heritage that we valued and so we chose a Christian school in the Reformed tradition like we had known. We trust it to be a stable environment." Several parents commented on the Reformed tradition as the founding principles for ECS. This was desirable as these parents continued to claim this belief system for themselves. Other parents, not of the Reformed tradition, recognized the value of the Christian education at ECS so they noted that the walls between their denomination and that of the Reformed tradition, although different, have become blurred in the school context. To these parents, denominational differences were not seen to be as important and their main desire was for the school to be a "Christian" school, no matter what denominations were present. One parent, not of the CRC background claimed, "A denominational affiliation … helps focus its Christian priorities." Depending upon one's heritage, tradition may be a factor in sending children to ECS.

Although most parent respondents indicated one or more of the most common six factors as important reasons to send their children to the Christian school, a few other parents identified additional reasons such as smaller class sizes for the purpose of providing more individual instruction and firm and consistent Christian discipline.

Summary and reflections on why parents send their children to ECS.

I was not surprised that the most stated reason for sending children to the Christian school was the Christian perspective on education. After all, that is the most discussed and celebrated distinctive of ECS. However, a very few parents did not articulate the Christian perspective as an important factor and one parent even said, "Christian values are a nice bonus, but are not a condition to [my] children attending this school." It is a natural transition to expect parents to be concerned about the school environment and, therefore, note that warm and caring community is an essential factor in choosing a school. Likewise, teachers seem to be another obvious factor as the educators who build the community and provide the Christian perspective within the classroom. I was somewhat surprised that the percentage of parents identifying Christian teachers as a factor for sending their children to a Christian school was not given a higher rating. On the other hand, I suspect that an assumption may have been made that since Christian perspective is the most important factor, it is a logical consequence that Christian teachers carry out this instruction within this framework. It was still, I think, an interesting result.

The mention of high academic standards as an important factor is fraught with issues. Without a doubt some parents are concerned about the quality of education their children receive. Some base their choice of school on the standard of education they perceive that their children receive. They are often the strongest advocates of an even higher standard of education and more testing to determine that student achievement is at its best. At the same time, other parents see the emphasis on academic student achievement as a hindrance to the growth of all children's gifts and talents. Usually, their wishes are based on experiences with their own children who struggle with academics. The children may feel their non-academic strengths are not affirmed, especially in a school that emphasizes high academics. This is an on-going discrepancy; school personnel struggle to acknowledge and affirm the gifts of all students while similarly striving to develop in the students the skills that need affirmation and growth.

It is understandable that some parents consider the safety of their children a factor worth noting in their choice of schools. Considering the media coverage of violence perpetrated within schools and by school age children, safety is a concern. Not only the physical safety of the students is paramount but also the atmosphere or environment of the school will impact the students' learning.

In fact, the whole aspect of personal safety may take on new dimensions considering world events and global situations in the past few months. It would be interesting to hear what parents might say now, after the terrorist attacks that have occurred in the United States that claimed the lives of many people. It is probable that under normal circumstances many parents have felt that safety, in terms of war and terrorist violence, was assured in our country. But, considering these recent events, the emphasis on safety might have been a greater factor in the eyes of parents. Truly, concern for our children's safety increases or decreases depending on the circumstances in our lives. At another time or in another place, this factor might have been rated as much more important.

Although only 12% of parent respondents indicated tradition as a likely factor in their choice to send their children to the Christian school, I suspect it is actually higher, considering the heritage and background of many of the parents and families at the school. One parent so aptly described this possibility: "Perhaps tradition is a factor that influences more than we know." This seems a worthwhile reflection. Based on the number of families who still adhere to the Christian Reformed Church denomination, the impact of the Reformed tradition seems considerable. Some parents recognize this; for others, it may have been unconscious. I would suggest that, for some, attendance at this school was a given, not a deliberate choice that the family made once their children reached school age. Based on their history and the expectations within this Dutch culture, to choose another school may have been seen as a betrayal; to do so would be to go against the norm. I believe that, although many parents did not indicate this feature, they would probably concur that tradition is indeed a factor in sending their children to ECS.

Question 2: What important features make ECS a Christian school?

Within the answers to this question, parent respondents identified various features that make ECS a Christian school. Several important themes emerged. Table 6 indicates the top reasons identified by parent respondents. Some parents indicated more than one reason to this question, but all reasons were tabulated in percentages and the number of parents responding.

Table 6: Important Features that Make ECS a Christian School

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 233 Parents	%	#
Christian teachers are good role models for the students.	80	186
Christian perspective is integrated into school life.	74	172
Environment is caring and warm with good friendships for children.	44	103
Christian perspective taught at school is consistent with home beliefs.	41	96
Devotions (Bible studies and chapel times) are regularly scheduled.	22	51
Parent and community members participate in the life of the school.	20	47
Prayer and worship are a regular part of school life.	17	40

Important features that make ECS a Christian school (see Table 6)

The most important factor parent respondents' recognized as a feature that makes ECS a Christian school is the teachers. About 80% of the parents felt that Christian teachers who walk the talk and live their Christian faith are essential components in what makes the school Christian. One parent said that ECS has "competent teachers with well-structured programs and friendly staff." ECS staff were seen as "caring staff who are willing to get directly involved in students' lives" and to make a positive difference.

Another parent talked about children enjoying their teachers and feeling accepted and welcomed. The children appreciate the Christian teaching and see that the teachers believe and share the same faith. Some parents speak about their children being encouraged to learn by teachers who show them respect. Other parents were impressed by phone calls received from teachers simply to ask how things are going, or, to communicate when things aren't working smoothly because of student behaviour or other negative interactions between students. One parent expressed admiration for a teacher who requested parental advice and support in resolving an issue. Teachers were also noted to have met with other students who show leadership abilities to conscript their help resolving some situations. Other parents commented that teachers begin new units with thematic statements showing how that subject or topic relates to God and God's Word and why this topic should be studied. Many parents commented that the character of the staff portrays their Christian life; they live and teach with true Christian belief.

Second, parents felt that the Christian perspective, integrated into all parts of the curriculum, was a major factor in making ECS a Christian school. Clearly, 74% of the population surveyed suggested that the Christian faith permeates every subject, rather than just being seen in "religion" class. Some see how "God is integrated into everything -- studies, discipline, consequences and how you treat each other." Dealings with bullies and other negative behaviours were identified as areas where Christian discipline was given, while showing consideration and love to all students involved. Even homework assignments, according to some parents, were evidence of teachers having made a "concerted effort of integrating the Christian faith and lifestyle with the subject matter." One parent commented that staff worked hard to show God's involvement in the world such as "openly teaching how God made some animals with special equipment to deal with their environment."

In another context, a parent stated, "my children are exposed to issues of injustices, poverty, persecution and then challenged to do something about it." Even in the area of sports, some parents noted that the contract students had to sign before joining the basketball team was an excellent way to teach what it means to behave and act in a manner taught by Christ, both on and off the basketball court. Parents also talked of the songs and books that focus and reflect God. Christian holidays dealing with church life and themes, such as Reformation Day, Christmas and Easter, are celebrated, while other non-Christian days, such as Halloween are avoided or critiqued in light of the Christian faith. Many respondents were pleased that Christian values are emphasized above the desires of individuals or special interest groups and that the students are encouraged to express their faith in God. Teachers quoted scripture and sing songs with the students that praise and glorify God. The integration of the Christian perspective into all areas of school life was a fact parents delighted in because it was consistent with views they wished to transmit to their children.

Interestingly, about 41% of parent respondents specifically noted that they felt the importance of the Christian integration was because this worldview was consistent with their home beliefs and family teachings. One parent said,

> It is important to us that there is this continuity between what they (our children) learn at home and church and what they learn at school. We feel by putting our children in an environment where there are like-minded children and adults, this can only help strengthen their personal faith to help prepare them for the times in their life when they won't be surrounded by like-minded people.

Another parent summarized this sentiment quite well, "the most important feature of our school is that administration, teachers, curriculum, parents and members work together in teaching our children the ways of the Lord. I feel very comfortable knowing that we all have the same goals." This integration of the Christian perspective into all areas of school life is accomplished through a dedicated and faithful Christian community.

Parents stated that the community also plays a vital role in making ECS a Christian school. Quite a number of the parent respondents noted that the community is caring and warm, with good friendships for their children. Many parents expressed a comfort in familiarity and an atmosphere of love and caring. Everybody knows each other by name and different grades interact, especially in Junior High and Senior High. Older students were commended for caring for the younger students. Even office staff was mentioned as caring for students and knowing them by name. One parent indicated how she, as a single parent, was not well accepted in another Christian school context. However, she states:

> At ECS people treat us as a Christian would. They don't see us as having no dad or divorced. They see and love us as individuals and treat us as Jesus would. That to me is a wonderful blessing from God and a true example of what a Christian school is all about.

Some parents spoke about the strong sense of community and belonging felt among the families in the school built by sharing special events such as pancake breakfasts, assemblies, concerts, potlucks and the school auction. Other parents spoke of great parent, teacher and student communication that strengthens the community.

The distinctiveness of ECS is the integration of the Christian perspective into all areas of school life. This factor was clearly noted and applauded by parents as a vital factor in making ECS a Christian school. However, many parents mentioned the more explicit activities that give evidence to the Christian character of the school. They spoke of the regular scheduling of devotions, Bible studies and chapel times. Some parents applauded these as important evidence that ECS is a Christian school. One parent commented that her children invite her to these times of worship, "Will you come to chapel? You should see… we sing some fun songs." Some parents explicitly mentioned that prayer and worship times are important features of this Christian school. Assemblies that challenge students to a life of faith and action were lauded as evidence of a Christian school. Pro-life activities, service projects in the community and repair work at Rehoboth camp all evidence a life called to be faithful to God. These specific times of devotion and worship attune the students to God with specific Christian teachings and acts of praise and worship. Some parents equated the integration of the Christian worldview with intentional acts of religious devotion they considered to be necessary indicators of a Christian school.

Finally, a few parent respondents indicated that participation and volunteer service of parents and other community members are important features that make ECS a Christian school. A community is not only composed of the teachers, administration and students but requires input from parents. With parental and community involvement encouraged, obviously a much stronger community is created. This active involvement and commitment by volunteers was seen as evidence of an effective Christian school. Ultimately, the more closely the home and school work together, the more effective the message to students that the Christian worldview is to be lived and practiced in all areas of life.

Summary and reflections on what makes ECS a Christian School

I anticipated that the important features that make ECS a Christian school would be similar to the reasons parents send their children to the Christian school. If parents continue to have their children attend a particular Christian school, one might assume the school has features that parents' desire. This appears to be the case. In both questions the integration of the Christian faith, Christian teachers and the community were clearly identified as the most important factors in a Christian school.

Again, I was not surprised that the most commonly stated reason for sending children to the Christian school was the Christian perspective on education. However, the integration of this perspective as an important feature that makes ECS a Christian school was noted by only 74% of the parents. Why the difference? Many parents identified in specific terms how ECS gives evidence of this Christian distinctiveness. Parents who noted the integration of the Christian perspective did not necessarily note the devotion (22%) or prayer and worship times (17%). These other components made up a total of 39% of the respondent population. Because this breakdown in themes is more specific in the second section, it may make the results look somewhat disjointed; however, I do not believe this is the case. The total number of parents responding to the integration of the Christian perspective as the major reason for educating children at ECS was quite substantial. It would seem that this integration, as the most celebrated distinctive, is indeed a powerful and effective force contributing to Christian education at ECS.

Likewise, teachers seem to be another important element in the process of Christian education. I was somewhat surprised that the identification of Christian teachers by only 40% of the parents as a factor for sending their children to a Christian school was not given a higher rating in question one. However, in question two, indicating the important features that make ECS a Christian school, parents rated the Christian teachers as the highest factor (80%). This participant response seems to confirm my previous suspicion. I suspected that an assumption may have been made that since Christian perspective is the most important factor it is a logical consequence that there be Christian teachers to carry out this task. Therefore, parents had not identified teachers as the reason for sending their children to a Christian school. A final analysis of what makes a school Christian suggests that it is clear teachers provide the Christian perspective. Thus, teachers would be an essential consideration in what makes a Christian school a Christian school.

In both question one and two, reference to the community as a caring and warm environment is very closely rated. It makes sense that 51% of parents identify the atmosphere of a place and the community situation as an essential factor in choosing a school. Then, when parents identified the factors that make ECS a Christian school, the community is again rated highly by 44% of the parents; these ratings are very close. Both answers indicate that the community is an important contributor to a Christian school and an effective Christian education.

In considering the results thus far, the top three important factors that make for a Christian school are clearly obvious: the Christian perspective, the Christian teachers and the Christian community.

Question 3: What important features hinder the effectiveness of ECS as a Christian school?

Within the answers to this question parent respondents identified various features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS as a Christian school. The responses to this question were the most difficult to analyze because there were a wide variety of discussions. It was a greater challenge to figure out the more common themes. In identifying these themes I deliberately allowed even minor distinctions between the categories so that I could more clearly specify what might be hindrances to education at ECS. Thus, there appears to be some overlap in the designated themes, but the distinctions are important.

Parents, also, seemed to have more difficulty answering this question. Some parents refused to comment because they claimed that they had not experienced hindrances to the education of their children while others indicated that any difficulties had been resolved and were no longer noteworthy. Some parents connected to the school for only a short time reported that they felt uncomfortable answering this question because they did not know enough or had not had enough experience with the school. Other parents seemed uneasy, in some cases, about being straightforward and honest. It appeared that some answers were "softly" spoken while others were quick and to the point.

However, in the end, several themes emerged. Table 7 indicates the top 10 features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS. The most common response has only 17% of the population naming this feature. Nevertheless, these were reasons identified by more than 3% of the parent respondents. Some parents indicated more than one hindrance to Christian education; all of their reasons were tabulated in percentages and according to the number of parents that responded.

Table 7: Features that Hinder the Effectiveness of ECS

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 233 Parents	%	#
Cliques noticeable among parents/students, that don't allow "outsiders."	17	40
Too closed an environment; need other denominations/variety of Christians.	13	30
Lack of respect in students, between students and from student to teacher.	10	23
Hiring concerns for administrators, teachers, substitutes; need Christians.	10	23
Too lax in discipline; evidence of bullying and put-down behaviours.	6	14
Concerns about politics/administration; joining EPS, communication issues.	6	14
More "problem" students entering school; need to determine their "fit."	6	14
More funds/resources needed; special needs students, teacher resources...	6	14
Classes getting too large; lack of individual attention for students in need.	4	9
Too many non-Christian families coming in; not in sync with our beliefs.	4	9
More options needed in junior and senior high; variety of choice necessary.	3	7

Features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS (see Table 7)

According to parent respondents, the most common hindrance to the effectiveness of Christian education at ECS appears to be cliques that prevent "outsiders" from feeling part of the group. About 17% of the parents felt cliques among parents and/or students isolated newcomers. One parent said, "As a new family it is very difficult to get to know people and feel welcome." Another parent declared, "I don't feel like I can be part of the strong tradition. I feel like an outsider and that feeling may be passed on to my child. Not being part of the 'family' may not be so great for the sense of Christian community we really want." Other respondents felt the attitudes of some teachers and parents are more negative toward those not affiliated with the Christian Reformed tradition or background. Some suggested that the children in the school have been together for many years and that they tend to stay together in their own little groups; this makes it very difficult for newcomers to fit in. It was indicated that, while the students and other parents seem to be more cliquish, "the teachers are nice, more caring and accepting." Some parent respondents also sensed reluctance on the part of the existing community to accept change and growth in certain areas. "Insiders" had difficulty listening to "outsider" ideas and possibilities.

Another response, closely connected to the concept of cliques, suggested that the ECS community is too closed an environment. Some parent respondents specifically declared a need for greater diversification of denominations and cultures at ECS. Feeling that there is "too narrow a range of ethnic and socio-economic student body" some parents suggested that ECS needs to inculcate “more visible minorities or differing cultures.” Some parents felt the “lack of support for all Christian denominations;” if people were “not Dutch or Reformed” they were inferior. Some felt that being “too tied to a single denomination, the Christian Reformed Church” did not allow the community “to draw from the strength and diversity of others.” Respondents were advocating that this “protectionist attitude existed before the joining of EPS.” Some parents felt that “a broad base of students would threaten the integrity of the school system;” these same parents suggested that this protectionist attitude might be changing. For the school only to contain families from a particular ethnic or denominational origin there develops an “us-versus-them mentality” that “hinders the school’s broader community and prevents people from thinking outside the lines and from a more eclectic perspective.” The advice was to open the denominational and cultural boundaries, meet more new parents and welcome and support new families.

Student lack of respect towards teachers and between students was another theme that deserves attention. Some parents felt that poor behaviour sometimes goes a long time before teachers act to change the situation. One parent said, “Students are not always exemplary in their behaviour. I often see and hear disrespectful words and attitudes portrayed in school toward fellow classmates and teachers.” Another parent indicated that the teachers’ expectations for Christian behaviour, proper language, and respectful attitudes seem lower than they should be. It was suggested that, “Whether certain behaviours are permitted at home is irrelevant. Each student should be required to adhere to a code of conduct while at school or on school property.” Another parent felt a lot of tolerance on the part of teachers and not enough saying “no” to students. One parent testified to observing how physically and verbally rough some students are to each other. She speaks about one of her children saying to her, “A lot is tolerated here, Mom.” Some respondents tried to account for this tolerance because “we’re called to act in love and understanding.” At the same time, they claim, “the public school bans things that ECS tolerates.” Another parent tried to explain this by saying that the lack of action may be an “unwillingness or inability to deal with situations where community breaks down.” The attitude “kids will be kids” is sometimes used to accept inappropriate behaviour. This lack of respect is also evident in some students stealing and wrecking other students’ property. One parent suggested, "Rebuke and discipline are required, at times, to foster appropriate growth in children."

Lack of respect is definitely a hindrance to Christian education. The lack of respect takes a more direct form of concern when it becomes bullying and put-downs. Some parents also believe teachers don't always take a firm stand on issues even though it may be Biblical. According to one parent "there seems to be a real need to 'tolerate,' in order that some students not feel uncomfortable or hurt." Discipline, parents suggest, needs to be more strict and teachers should not be "too tolerant" of bad behaviour. These inappropriate behaviours are felt to be a hindrance to Christian education at ECS.

An ongoing concern among parent respondents has been the political ramifications of joining EPS. These parent respondents are still concerned that ECS have the final say in hiring the principal, who must have the final say in all teacher and assistant principal hiring. Parents want to ensure that the administrators, teachers and even substitute teachers are Christian in their beliefs and can teach from a Christian perspective; this is the only way to ensure the continuation of the Christian perspective in Christian education. Some parents feel that the goals at the three campuses are not always compatible and that the effort to force sameness is detrimental to the school. One parent declares that there are "different agendas (goals) at different campuses" and that it is a "reality of not being one school but rather three schools with distinct differences and needs." Other political or administration issues include: busing problems, at times poor communication between staff and administrators, and the inability to replace the teaching staff when the need to do so may be there.

A number of other factors are seen as hindrances to Christian education at ECS. Some feel there has been an "increase in the wrong type of student to our school" in the last few years. These students come to our school without the background of Christian education. Their behaviour and attitudes are seen as a negative influence at ECS. The perception is that there is more peer pressure on the students, especially at the senior campus level to drink, do drugs, be sexually active, watch unsuitable movies and listen to inappropriate music. It is believed that these "problem" students are causing negative forces that interfere with Christian education.

Also, a few parents felt that the lack of funding and resources has hurt Christian education. A shortage of computers and computer training is a result of a lack of funds. Other parents were concerned about the "lack of funds for upgrading the physical site," but they commented that this has not affected the quality of instruction. On the other hand, some parents feel that lack of funds prevents more up-dated and much needed curriculum. Others feel that growth problems are a result of joining EPS; these problems include classes getting too big, lack of space and more teachers being needed. One parent felt, "teachers are not given enough time to plan and develop curriculum. Sometimes I feel that the teachers are expected to do so much more than teach the class." Other parents indicated that more options such as shop and computer classes are needed and more scholarships should be given. At the same time, some felt that a lack of money has prevented the resource program from being more equipped, with necessary assistance available for the needy student. This affects the Christian education program, too.

A few respondents asked serious questions about programs developed to assist special needs students. Parents claim that non-academic kids don't fit; they feel like outsiders. It was recommended that the community find reasons to celebrate with these non-academic kids. Some suggested that Christian teachers re-look at the resource model used to determine if it is the best "Christian" model. How do we recognize differences? Is this a Christian method? Do we have a Christ-like model of education for special students? "Working from the 'box' of 'normal' kids limits expressions of God given talents," said one parent. The emphasis on H-Lat (district) tests and achievement (government) tests bring into question individual concern for each child. Do we really live out our Christian perspective in the way we deal with special children?

One parent expressed concern that the community pays for upgrades to the property and yet the basic needs of some students are not met. All children need to have the education that they require to meet their individual needs. Another parent thinks,

> The school could do better at identifying each child's strengths and building on them. I know that this is talked about … but some of the things that the school does appears to go against this philosophy. When you read newsletters, you read about the kids who have outstanding talents and/or abilities such as in sports. The 'best' pictures are chosen for the foyer or sent to other exhibits. The 'best' are chosen for parts in the school play. Soon the other children quit trying; they give up on physical education when they do not meet the sports

team or they feel they are not good enough to have their work displayed. Somehow, ECS needs to find ways and resources for recognizing all students, even those with exceptionalities.

Closely related to concerns about "problem" kids coming into the school is the concern about increasing non-Christian family influences. One parent advocates that the "acceptance of non-Christian children into school is very dangerous" because enforcing rules becomes increasingly difficult. Another parent believes that because of the new kids [her] kids are now saying bad words that come from the new kids. The common set of values that used to bind families that sent their children to the Christian school is not so common any longer. Not all families share the same lifestyle choices openly accepted in some homes. It was stated that the greatest decline in 'Christian' education is obvious at the senior campus level. This was felt to be evident in the students' neglect of a positive Christian attitude; students seem to be refusing to honour and observe the 10 commandments and failing to cope with Christian doctrine. Parents are concerned about losing the "reformed, Biblical focus and becoming just another generic Christian school." One parent expressed this concern as a "slow but sure erosion of commitment by the Christian community as a whole in supporting the school." Over time, some parent respondents felt that the "problem" kids accepted into ECS would influence a decrease in Christian standards.

A variety of other features were expressed as hindrances to Christian education at ECS. It was perceived that only a few parents carry most of the volunteer load that leads to overwork and a group of other parents who don't feel a part of the school. Sometimes the strict rules and regulations at the school are discouraging, while fear of change, resulting in stagnation, is not a good thing. "We always did it that way" is not a good reason for doing some things. Small-mindedness is identified as people only thinking of themselves. One example given was in reference to families wanting better busing for their children at the expense of families who live a distance from our schools; or, the "negative comments about perceived inequities between the two campuses." Some respondents felt there was too much gossip and talk, while another parent claimed that,

> ECS is not obvious enough about what Christianity is all about. General principles of Christianity are exhibited well enough in most course material and classroom experiences. However, specific opportunities are missed. Devotions, at the beginning of the day, rarely include Bible reading but teachers and students choose other books to read. They may be excellent books, even devotional books, but nothing quite substitutes for God's word over man's word.

Various other features were mentioned in isolation. They were not frequent enough to be identified under a response or pattern where more than 2% of the population indicated a concern.

Summary and reflections on features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS

Features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS were more difficult to analyze because of the wide variety of responses. Responses could be specific or general. Clearly, most responses are relational in nature and overlap in content. But, the breakdown of reasons into more specific categories makes it easier to identify exact features that hinder the effectiveness of Christian education.

Interestingly, although there are more categories than identified in the other questions, the highest percentage of parent respondents to any one theme begins at the lowest percentage of parent respondents identified for themes in the other two questions. Although there appeared to be many hindrances listed -- far more than features that make ECS a Christian school, it should be noted that the frequency of any one response is considerably less.

Identified concerns are usually relational. The existence of cliques is a problem most likely due to the close, intimate nature of the existing community. On one hand a close community is a desirable thing, but not to the extent where others are excluded. Considering the tradition of this community and the intensity of efforts to protect the reformed Christian worldview, it is no wonder that community members have become close knit. Although this truly may be a problem, it has also been a benefit to the development of a strong Christian community.

The issue of cultural sameness to the exclusion of others is closely connected to the problem of cliques. Close relationships have developed because people have similar goals and a common background. Rooted in the traditions of the Christian Reformed Church, these people share a common denomination and common basic beliefs that are evident in their worldview. Similarly, they are mostly of Dutch cultural background. The desire by parent respondents to celebrate the integration of the Reformed Christian perspective with the curriculum is also to recognize the roots of this worldview. To open this to other denominations and cultures will take time and require some change. Many of the parent respondents commenting on the cliques and closed culture of ECS are themselves Dutch and of the Christian Reformed Church background. It is good that these people recognize their own role in this scenario. This may, in fact, allow them to make the changes necessary and to fulfill their own desires to invite other denominations and cultures into the program of Christian education and the community offered at ECS.

The issue of lack of respect seems to be common in schools today. However, one would hope this problem were less within a Christian school than in other schools. The relational aspect of respect would indicate the age-old problem of people attempting to live together. There seems to be an added dimension here at ECS. This community has been together for a long time and familiarity may be part of the problem.

The frequency of these hindrances to Christian education seem much less than the features that make Christian education at ECS. Keeping all this in perspective would mean less discussion on these topics. Yet, our human nature is such that we will remember and dwell on the negative and forget the positive. One parent aptly described this scenario, "We can get so busy analyzing our school and concentrating on the negative things that we stop seeing what is good about our school."

Teacher Participants

This questionnaire, the first survey (Appendix D) , was sent to all teachers employed in the 2000-2001 academic school year. Of the 54 teachers in the system, 41 responded to this short answer survey, a 76% return rate from teachers. Approximately 68% of the teachers are full-time and 32% are part-time. Also, 49% of the surveys were returned by teachers having no children presently attending ECS while teachers whose children currently attend ECS returned 51% of the surveys. These teachers have the perspective of both teacher and parent; they had also received and responded to the parent survey first.

Three campuses were represented in the survey. Some teachers that taught at the Senior student campus also taught at the West campus; if they taught more than 50% of their time at one campus their survey was recorded there. Table 8 shows teacher responses on the return questionnaire from each campus. These figures are fairly representative of the overall population at the various campuses; West campus has the greatest population and the Senior High campus the least.

Table 8: Teachers Represented by Campus

Campus Represented	Returned Questionnaire: % of Responses per Campus	Returned Questionnaire: # of Responses per Campus
West campus	49	20
Northeast campus	32	13
Senior campus	17	7

Teachers who have taught in various divisions responded to the questionnaire. Of course, many teachers have taught in more than one division. This gives these teachers a wider base of knowledge concerning what it is like to teach at ECS. Table 9 demonstrates the percentage of teachers who have taught in specific divisions as reflected on their survey responses.

Table 9: Percentage of Teachers Having Taught at Various Divisions

Divisions Taught by Teachers	% of Teachers	# of Teachers
Primary (Grades K,1,2,3)	49	20
Intermediate (Grades 4,5,6)	59	24
Junior High (Grades 7,8,9)	73	30
Senior High (Grades 10,11,12)	24	10

Many of the teaching staff have lived and taught within this school community for years. Table 10 indicates the number of years these teachers have been employed at ECS. Clearly 65% of the teachers surveyed have been at ECS for more than 10 years while 41% have been teaching at ECS for 16 years and longer.

Table 10: Number of Years Teachers Employed by ECS

Teaching Years at ECS	% of Years Taught	# of Years Taught
Less/equal to 2 years	0	0
3 to 5 years	17	7
6 to 10 years	17	7
11 to 15 years	24	9
16+ years	41	17

On the other hand, Table 11 indicates the number of teachers that have been employed by other schools. Approximately half of the teachers have never taught in a school other than ECS. While 37% have been employed for one to five years in another school, only 14% have worked in another school for six or more years. Without a doubt the teachers at ECS have been around a long time and are a well-established part of this community.

Table 11: Number of Years Teachers Employed by Another School (not ECS)

Years Teachers NOT at ECS	% of Years Not at ECS	# of Years Not at ECS
0 years (always at ECS)	49	20
1 to 5 years	37	15
6 to 10 years	12	5
11+ years	2	1

Important to the survey results is the assumption that the teacher population understands how ECS works. Each teacher respondent indicated his or her own perception of how familiar they felt about ECS. Considering how many teachers have been employed at ECS for a significant period of time, the results in table 12 are interesting. Only 32% of the teachers felt that they have an excellent knowledge of ECS, while 79% clearly indicated that they have a better than good understanding.

Table 12: Degree that Teachers Claim Knowledge of ECS

How well do you know ECS?	% of Teachers	# of Teachers
Excellent	32	14
Very Good	46	20
Good	17	7
Fair	0	0

Likewise, when considering the worldview of the teaching staff, it is important to note the denominational affiliation of the teachers employed at ECS; Table 13 displays the teacher representation according to denominational affiliation. As indicated by the responses given on the survey, 76% of the teacher respondents claim a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) affiliation. Other teachers belong to a variety of different denominations. The most common non-CRC affiliations include: Baptist, Presbyterian, Brethren and Anglican. "Others" include respondents who did not give their denominational affiliation and some who simply said, "not CRC."

Begun by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) the initial staff was of the CRC background for the express purpose of integrating this Christian perspective into the curriculum of life and learning. Over the years new staff have been hired. Obviously, the CRC representation remains high and compares to the parent population represented at the school.

Table 13: Teachers Represented by Denominational Affiliation

Teachers Represented by Denominational Affiliation	% of Teachers	# of Teachers
Christian Reformed Church	77	31
Baptist Church	10	4
Not CRC	5	2
Brethern Church	2	1
Anglican	2	1
Presbyterian Church	2	1
Unknown	2	1

Responses from Teacher Questionnaire: What makes ECS a Christian School?

Question 1: Why do you teach in a Christian School?

This question pried into the philosophical reasons behind the teacher's desire to teach in a Christian school. It also attempted to see what worldview issues might arise to determine the practice of Christian teaching. Many teachers expressed a primary reason for teaching in the school and then suggested other reasons; all reasons were tabulated and are indicated below in Table 14 in percentages and number of respondents.

Table 14: Reasons Teachers Suggest for Teaching in a Christian School

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 41 Teachers	%	#
Desire to teach from and with a Christian perspective.	98	40
The community is great – supportive and helpful.	20	8
Colleagues are of a like mind – supportive and sharing ideas.	17	7
Past history and traditions lead to teaching in this context.	12	5
Teach in order to fulfill baptismal promises made to children.	7	3
Only job available at the time began teaching career.	6	2

Reasons for teaching in a Christian school (see Table 14)

By far the majority of teachers, 98% of the participants, expressed their primary reason for teaching in a Christian school was their desire to teach from a Christian perspective within a Christian community. Most of the teachers at ECS expressed the personal conviction that this worldview, promoted at ECS, is the way that they too view the world and everything in it. It would seem that for a Christian teacher, the Christian perspective is the very heart of one's practice. Many teachers indicated that they teach at ECS for personal reasons, so that they can share a part of themselves. Throughout the teacher responses were numerous suggestions that their personal Christian beliefs and commitment to God are such an integral part of self that to separate beliefs from words and actions is unnatural, if not impossible.

One teacher said, "It (ECS) is a place where I feel that my beliefs, values, ideals are reflected and upheld." Another teacher said, "I see God in everything and I need to teach that because I can't separate God and teaching." Another teacher expressed the pain of experiencing personal conflict when she taught in a context where she was unable to freely share her beliefs. To be "detached from her personal self was too difficult." Teachers also spoke of teaching in a Christian school as a calling to ministry. It is a "marvellous opportunity to share my Christian faith with others, students, parents and teachers… This position, also, gives ample opportunity to share faith with others outside our community." This "call" is a call from God for some teachers to make a contribution to people. In other words, some teachers indicated that they have "a call to provide a Christian education that will shape the lives of children, guiding children in developing a discerning mind, guided by faith." Another teacher talked about the Christian perspective being common ground on which students and teachers can begin to tackle and understand the material. This desire to teach in a Christian school is a longing to equip children not only academically but also spiritually. Teachers hope students will learn to know God's word, experience God's love and celebrate their life in Christ. One teacher explained, "One can't teach or be without a worldview. If I'm Christian, I need to teach Christianly… I need to help students see that also, to see the consistency between word and deed. Our life, beliefs and attitudes need to be one."

The Christian community was seen by some teachers as a good reason to teach in a Christian school. My study suggests that this community is defined by the relationship that has developed mostly between parents, staff and students. This "close community" is a drawing factor pulling teachers into a relationship in which "faith can be relevant... I am thankful to have a relationship with my students and parent community that is based on a common thread of service and responsibility in regard to kingdom issues."

The Christian community is also composed of teachers who are like-minded in their Christian worldview. To a number of teacher respondents, the support and sharing of these personal worldview ideas are reasons to teach in a Christian school. One teacher spoke of choosing this work place "because I wanted to work with other Christians who are struggling to work as Christian scholars and to communicate and share that same struggle with students." Another teacher wanted "to be able to share the faith with students and colleagues without being worried about political correctness." Still others spoke of the desirable "atmosphere of working with Christian colleagues and the challenge of developing distinctly Christian curriculum." Ultimately, the community atmosphere incorporates the like-minded colleagues; sharing a Christian worldview is the key that binds all of them together in the task of Christian education.

Because of the history of this community, the traditions have led a few teachers to teach in this environment. Without a doubt ECS has provided a Christian heritage that is passed on to some of the teachers. One teacher said,

> It is my heritage. I graduated from a Christian school and a Christian college. I believe passionately that you are what you believe. I teach in a Christian school because I believe that Christian kids must be given the tools to make life decisions based on what they believe. In short, kids need to be taught to put their faith into action.

Another teacher acknowledges attending a Christian school as a child and is teaching in a Christian school because "Christian schools are a way to pass the story from generation to generation."

Finally, a very few teacher respondents made mention of fulfilling baptismal promises as a reason to teach in a Christian school, and a couple claimed the Christian school was the only school hiring at the time their career began. Since then, they have become more involved and a part of the Christian school culture at ECS.

Summary and reflections on reasons teachers teach in a Christian school

As with the parent reasons for sending their children to the Christian school, the teacher reasons are basically the same. The integration of the Christian perspective into the curriculum is a motivation for a Christian teacher to be a part of this environment. Within this context, the teacher can "be who he or she is." Teachers can live their lives and do their work expressing their worldview freely and openly. Within this context Christian teachers have identified the benefits of a common belief system shared by the parents and supporting community. The privilege of working with colleagues who share the same convictions seems to complete the picture of wholeness. This is an integration of a Christian worldview that permeates the teacher's life, work and relationships.

Although other factors are identified, it seems noteworthy that far less emphasis is placed on anything other than the shared common belief system. This would appear to be an expected outcome since the distinctive feature of this school is the Christian worldview. It would be natural that teachers would be attracted to this environment because of their own interest and personal commitment to the Christian worldview.

The practicality of needing work influenced a few teachers to take jobs in the Christian school. Over the years, however, they have remained and the expression of their faith and commitment to Christian education was obvious throughout other answers on the survey.

Question 2: What features make ECS a Christian School?

Teachers were asked to identify the most important factors that they believe make ECS a Christian school. Having worked and lived for a long time within the context of ECS, I attempted to determine how their experiences and resulting perceptions compared to those of the parents. Many teachers expressed more than one factor that contributes to making ECS a Christian school. All reasons were tabulated in Table 15 and presented in the percentage and number of respondents participating in the survey.

Features that make ECS a Christian school (see Table 15)

Within the experiences of life in ECS, 90% of the teachers claimed that education (teaching) from a Christian perspective or worldview is the distinctive factor that makes ECS a Christian school. This is the main reason that attracted Christian teachers to this environment and they obviously perceive that Christian education is a strong feature of the school. According to one teacher, this teaching, however inadequate, is a result of

> The constitution, statement of faith, the Christian commitment of the staff and parent community and the beginning faith response of students -- all are stumbling steps, but an obedient response to Christ's call to love him and show our thankfulness in all areas.

This is "a place of academic learning that is based on the word of God." To another, "The up front, purposeful manner in which God is acknowledged as the basis of everything" is evidence of the Christian perspective in teaching. This Christian teaching helps "students learn to act and think Christianly. There should be evidence of love and respect as students deal with each other and their teachers."

Table 15: Features that Make ECS a Christian School

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 41 Teachers	%	#
Teaching is from a Christian perspective.	90	37
The Christian community is supportive and helpful.	56	23
Shared common (communal) beliefs of teachers and parents.	44	18
Christian teachers teaching the children.	41	17
Working, living, worshiping our God together.	34	14

According to the teachers, teaching from a Christian perspective is the "backbone to the curriculum." The perception of students "as God's children modifies the way we interact with them." It involves "valuing students as learners in God's kingdom," which means, "they are respected and listened to." In teaching there is a "reasonable variety of courses and options for students to develop and uncover their God-given gifts." Teaching from a Christian perspective means "investigating and exploring all parts of created reality with a sense of wonder, awe and reverence." It includes dealing with each concept "in a way that recognizes God's sovereignty… such as in genetics as the human genome project – we are more than the sum of our genetic information." This Christian perspective is a worldview integrated into curriculum teaching but also includes the freedom to read the Bible and pray openly. With this freedom we do not need to hide the word "Christian" in our name. Bulletin boards, signs, biblical principles and our expectations of each other all lead to an environment which integrates the Christian worldview, recognition that God is Lord of all life and all learning helps us decide "what to teach, how to teach and how to relate to others."

Evidently the community of parents and other supporters are essential elements in what makes ECS a Christian school. The supportive, helpful encouragement of a Christian community made up especially of parents was identified by about 56% of the teacher respondents as an important factor of Christian education. Obviously, the impact of teaching alone is not enough. One teacher emphatically declares the importance of community:

> The Christian community is so important and so vital in making our school a success. Knowing that I have parental support in everything I do and say makes it very easy for me to effectively teach and impact students. I can express my worldview on students and confidently state what I believe and why I do things the way I do.

This assurance of support and confirmation is based on a history of strong support that has surrounded the Christian teachers. No wonder this Christian community support becomes an important feature of the Christian school.

Closely related, but slightly different, is the declaration by about 44% of teacher respondents that the shared common (communal) beliefs of teachers and parents make ECS a Christian school. Not only is their support strongly felt but the underlying belief and value system of teachers and parents is similar. One teacher said,

> All staff, administration, board, parents and children are, more or less, on the same wave length. This is a great advantage when desiring to educate children and lead a community. We all know where we should be headed, albeit the methods chosen to do so aren't always agreed upon.

This "common set of beliefs," even though open to personal interpretation, helps members work together for a better Christian education of children. Shared values go a long way in unifying the community and contributing to the Christian school.

To achieve the teaching of the Christian perspective, supported by the community that shares basic Christian beliefs, 41% of the teacher respondents identified Christian teachers, committed to God and Christian education, as important factors that make ECS a Christian school. Undoubtedly the teachers "who know how to integrate Christianity into their teaching" play an important role. One teacher said, "Christian teachers are the role models of what it means to be Christ-like in thought, word and deed." They are "knowledgeable" and "trained in their area of education." Again, the Christian teachers are essential to making Christian education happen.

Ultimately, many teachers, being specific about some factors that make ECS a Christian school, were also somewhat vague. About 34% of teacher respondents made general statements that were more difficult to classify into the above themes. They identified the common life experiences -- working, living, and worshipping God -- as important factors in making ECS a Christian school. Whether worshipping together in assemblies or other community functions, the common experiences bind the Christian community into a diverse but unified community where these teachers work, live and worship God. These too are important features of ECS.

Summary and reflection on features that make ECS a Christian school

Both the parent population and now teachers indicated the same factors that make ECS a Christian school. The Christian perspective, the teachers and the community are clearly the most essential elements in this Christian school. Teachers who have been involved in the community for many years experienced a high level of general satisfaction. They teach from a worldview that is personal and to which they are passionately committed. This workplace, albeit not perfect, is set within a community of parents and teachers, equally dedicated to Christian education. Furthermore, they are part of a wider supporting community that embraces this same tradition of Christian education.

Question 3: What features hinder the effectiveness of ECS?

Teachers were asked to reflect on what features hinder the effectiveness of ECS as a Christian school. The diversity of answers over a wide scope of possibilities is portrayed in Table 16. Many teachers expressed more than one factor and all suggestions were tabulated and are accounted for in the descriptions.

Features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS (see Table 16)

It seems that the level of dissatisfaction about features that hinder the effectiveness of Christian education at ECS is the greatest in what may be the broadest category. About 32% of teacher respondents suggested, in one way or another, that the vision or expectations about and for Christian education are too narrow in scope or difficult to interpret.

Table 16: Features that Hinder the Effectiveness of ECS

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 41 Teachers	%	#
Limited vision – narrow-mindedness.	32	13
Less respect evident; should be more respect.	22	9
Politics and administration concerns.	20	8
Lack of staff nurture.	17	7
Demands of curriculum are too great.	15	6
Becoming stagnant because we fear change.	12	5
Cliques between parents and student groups.	8	3
Varied parent/family lifestyles not always in agreement.	8	3
Failure to walk the talk.	8	3
Sinful nature of humans cause difficulties.	8	3
Poor communication patterns.	7	3
Negative student responses to Christianity.	7	3

These responses encompass many possibilities. One thought suggests that ECS has too narrow a focus on the concept of Christianity. One teacher suggests that the "search for the Holy Grail of Reformed Christian perspective" is useless. "It [the perfect Reformed perspective] does not exist because Reformed Christianity is a cultural ethos more than a religious ethos." The suggestion is that "many of our students still come from the CRC Church and this Dutch, private school stereotype is still apparent. I wish more church denominations would embrace Christian education." Another teacher perceives ECS as a "tight exclusive community that often tends not to be as open to other churches, other than CRC." One teacher suggests a hindrance has been joining EPS while another teacher criticizes the "exclusiveness of ECS, isolation from 'the world out there'." This "not being more in the world without being of the world" is a perceived difficulty. There is a feeling that the greater community is unnecessarily afraid of opening the doors to this "conservative element." It is believed that maybe this "unwillingness or inability to diversify our Christian student body" is due possibly to a "Dutch arrogance. Perhaps a community's unspoken belief that the CRC is 'the church'. This breeds intolerance." At the same time, teacher respondents do not wish to compromise Christian educational values, beliefs or the vision. It would be a terrible thing if the Christian school's basic "vision is compromised to the wishes of any person or public pressure."

Within this narrow focus or limited vision some teachers suggest "inconsistencies in expectations cause splits in the student body and staff." What type of Christian school does the community really want? One that focuses on the curriculum, with the Christian perspective integrated into all aspects of learning, emphasizing academics? Or, should the development of personal faith be emphasized more? And, is it the school's responsibility to deal with lifestyle issues? In actuality, some teachers perceive that the ECS focus has become too much on performance. Parents and teachers "focus too much on excelling, always being above average." Academic needs are seen as more important than emotional needs. From some parents there is "pressure for us to be strictly an academic school with a black and white discipline policy… Parents have pushed for us to expel 'bad kids'." But some teachers "believe, first and foremost, that we are a Christian school, versus an academic school, and that everything we do must model our beliefs. We are also a family school and need to enrol all children in a family, not just the smart ones."

In another discussion, some teachers wondered about the emphasis that should be placed on faith development as a learning and growing experience or as a personal, faith commitment to Jesus Christ. One teacher suggests "the notion that Christian perspective can be compartmentalized and written with a series of Bible verses leads to a simplistic, moralistic recipe expression of Christianity." If this were the worldview, this teacher feels that the Reformed view of life, scholarship and faith would be cheapened. This, too, is a limited vision.

The aspect of respect is seen by about 22 % of the teacher respondents as a factor that hinders the effect of ECS. They believe that respect has to do mostly with the way people treat other people. Students know what is right and how they should treat others, but doing so is more challenging. Some students have difficulty applying Christian teachings in their relationships. This lack of respect sometimes spills into the mistreatment of property. Even amongst staff, different teachers have different expectations of student behaviour. Is there a cultural aspect to respect and behaviour towards other people?

One teacher of Dutch background suggested that the Dutch have a history of a culture that is more abrupt or rough in mannerisms toward each other. Familiarity with each other might lead to a careless or callous treatment of another person. Another teacher proposed that the inside jokes are a sign of the Dutch culture, jokes rising out of "relationships that are rougher, less polite than they would be with strangers." The Dutch culture may have an influence on how people act and behave in ways that appear disrespectful to other cultures.

Closely connected in the ratings as a hindrance to Christian education at ECS are the challenges and perceived difficulties in the area of politics, often involving the administration of the school; this includes administration personnel and the ECS Board members. About 20% of teacher respondents felt that there are administration difficulties. Herein lies the perception that "the present administration is being forced upon us – it has to work." An example given was the telephone system that didn't allow parents to reach the individual school; some personal contact with parents is lost! Personnel in administration always seem to be the same people. The suggestion was that "new blood" is needed in administration. As a part of the larger picture teachers expressed concerns over "political decisions that do not consider the 'greater good' of the whole school." Also, some teachers suggested that now that we are "part of a huge bureaucracy, all of our procedures have to fit with EPS." Some politics that directly affect teachers and students involve increasing class sizes, too much paper work, more achievement tests and curricular expectations. It was suggested "ECS has not lived long enough with the relationship to EPS to see whether the mission and vision statements will be a 'living' document." It is, "so easy to get caught up in the day to day busyness, it could be possible to forget the reformed nature of our vision or become complacent by following the right 'form' or 'format'." Ultimately, the ongoing fear is "hiring new administration or new teachers that do not share the same commitment and views of Christian education."

Some teacher respondents were also concerned about the perceived lack of staff nurture. It was felt that "teachers are expected to set goals for the classroom involving building community, sharing, communicating effectively, being non-judgmental, allowing individuality and diversity, celebrating all personalities, following student progress and seeking the right process." However, these same goals do not seem to be "set at the other levels of administration, with staff. Staff are left to their own initiatives." Staff members must motivate themselves and set their own standards. One teacher said that, "We, as a matter of course, encourage, compliment, identify, seek out, pursue, and discipline, etc… our students, but that's seldom done with us." Another said, "Terms like 'dedication' and 'commitment' can lead to burn-out, resentment and negative stress."

It was felt that there was "a need for greater models, as staff, support staff, administration and Board members, of authentic listening and caring." Many staff felt time for the practice and preparation of Christian education was a problem. There is not time given to develop common approaches and perspectives or to discuss curricular approaches. The reduction of involvement with other Christian schools in writing curriculum and teacher conventions is a concern. It was suggested, "Teachers need more time to collaborate and work together to develop better ways to get the message across."

With these pressures come "external pressures." These external pressures include "provincial testing, district regulations and paper work." Some of the "demands and curriculum and the pressure for achievement hinder effective Christian education. We are often forced with having to pass up 'Christian' moments to meet the demands of schedules and reporting." Curriculum demands are considered by some teachers to be noteworthy hindrances to Christian education.

Change is a factor that has greatly affected ECS in the last two years. According to a few teacher respondents, "fear of the unknown" can be a hindrance. One teacher said, "Some of the more conservative people want to keep our students shielded from possible 'worldly' influences." Another fear is the type of literature and novels sometimes used. According to one teacher, "This system clings to the past, thinking that change is bad." Some long-standing members have too much influence. They are stopping changes that are necessary for this population at this time. Thus, "this prevents us from being more effective at developing a world and life view within students that will challenge the status quo. Students do not come out of here intending to transform culture, but are quite content to be a part of this culture."

A number of other mentionable suggestions were made by teacher respondents. And, although these were not as highly identified by the majority of teacher respondents, there were about 8% of the teacher respondents that recognized cliques among parents, students and even staff as a hindrance to Christian education at ECS. One teacher expressed the opinion that "allowing students of different backgrounds into our student body may indeed dilute our 'Reformed' traditions, but we can learn from different students and parents. Some respondents (8%) proposed that the variety of parent and family lifestyles is not always in agreement. Different Christian parents seem to have different definitions of what makes for a Christian lifestyle. This difference produces stress and even conflict. Students play parents against each other and don't understand why some parents allow certain things and others do not. Yet, all are called 'Christian.' Also, failure to actually walk the talk is considered a problem by about 8% of teacher respondents. One teacher asked the question, "If I was put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?"

This possible lack of evidence of "an exciting, real relationship with Christ" is a concern to some teachers who feel it may be most noticeable at the teacher-student level. The follow up question for teachers is, "If students don't see the reality of (your) faith, how will they make it their own?" Concerns are present about "complacency in living the faith. We talk of being caretakers of creation but still find it difficult to conserve energy and resources in our own buildings." Some suggested that busyness is a distraction for adults while "peer pressure and the need to feel important in the eyes of their peers" are factors for students to contend with in living their faith. This can also be seen as a problem in the way "students deal with the ideas of love and acceptance toward everyone, particularly those who don't meet the 'standards' for acceptance."

A number of teacher respondents identified the "sinful human nature" as a hindrance to Christian education. Simply put, one teacher said, "Sin follows all through the door and we are not a perfect place." We need to recognize our human nature, "pride, peer pressure, greed and selfishness. It affects all parts and groups in our school." We all fail, to some degree, to communicate effectively. Some teachers also believed that reserved or non-enthusiastic student responses towards Christianity are negative influences on Christian education at ECS. Students "who have grown up in an all-Christian environment often take a lot of their Christian life for granted and 'act out' in ways not appropriate for a faith-following person." Students fearful to be "overt with Christianity" cause other students to be more cautious. Thus, excitement and a kind of vibrancy towards the Christian faith are stifled. Some teachers also identified negative parental influence as a hindrance. Some parents "fight their children's battles, belittle teachers and other students and make it impossible for that student to respond to a negative situation in the way we are trying to teach them" as a Christian response to circumstances. Student discipline or discipling is often tied up with this tension. The process itself may sometimes result in conflict. Ultimately, the expressed concerns deal with the practical, daily action of living out the Christian faith. These remain a concern and at times hindrances to effective Christian education.

Summary and reflections on features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS

The identification of factors that hinder the effectiveness of ECS has been a much more difficult question to analyze. Each teacher may perceive and express frustration about some aspect of life in teaching at ECS. Each account may be worded so differently that it is sometimes difficult to determine accurately which category may be the better fit. Some themes or patterns appear more specific, easy to identify. Others are more general, incorporating more open responses or possibilities.

One of the most important discussions involves the overall vision of the school. Although there is a current, active vision statement, the living out of this document remains a daily challenge. The question about the main purpose of Christian education is a good one: What type of Christian school does the community really want? This, of course, says a lot about the community's worldview and how the people within that community actually live their faith. One dimension focuses on the curriculum, with the Christian perspective integrated into all aspects of learning. Then the decision must be – on what type of learning? Different parents and teachers like to focus on different aspects such as the academics, personal/social or emotional/self-esteem aspects of the student. Can a school deal with all equally or does one component eventually become the focus?

Another vital question regarding ECS as a place of Christian education is: Should the development of personal faith be emphasized more than it is? Clearly the integration of Christian faith into the curriculum is the distinctive feature of education at ECS. However, some people feel that more emphasis should be placed on the personal aspect of faith, having a relationship with Jesus Christ. Christian education should not be just the acquiring of a perspective but the building of a relationship. Participants in ECS do not seem to agree about the importance of this aspect of faith. Some feel that it may automatically become a part of the education process while others feel that it is essential and more time should be given to it.

Finally, another significant issue arising from teacher respondents' perception of Christian education at ECS is the question of lifestyle. Is it the school's responsibility to deal with lifestyle issues related to Christian living, including relational issues of respect and how people treat each other? Christian education may also involve the actions or behaviours one participates in as part of their living, such as smoking and drinking. One teacher proposed "inside jokes are a sign of the Dutch culture." In some contexts, these jokes might be seen as put-downs or hurtful. They may not be intended that way; it is only in the interpretation by others who are not a part of the culture that these words might be seen as disrespectful. This teacher suggests that these jokes come out of relationships that are rougher and less polite than they would be with strangers. Within the Dutch culture there may be an inherent way of acting and behaving that appears disrespectful to another culture. At the same time, issues of smoking and drinking, often frowned upon by other Christians, may also have their roots in a cultural context. Both smoking and drinking have been a part of the Dutch culture for many years. In summary, it would seem that some issues at ECS might need to be informed by understanding the cultural background and then realizing the new climate or population of this next generation.

The history of ECS is a significant part of who the community has been and who they are today. When actions and behaviours are based on tradition, change becomes difficult. Deviating from our past can be painful. Many criticisms about ECS are based on long-standing traditions. The Dutch are from a Reformed heritage with a rich history in Christian education. Making changes to that educational movement is difficult. However, according to one respondent, "Sometimes we need to move forward rather than look back." These will be issues that the people involved in education at ECS will need to grapple with now and in the future.

Question 4: What makes your teaching Christian?

This question attempts to help teachers reflect on what they do, personally, that contributes to ECS being a Christian school. Table 17 portrays the first two responses most frequently named. These two main reasons were present in most of the teachers' responses, while two more specific or minor reasons were also identified. The minor reasons or patterns could easily fit into the two main responses. Teachers recorded more than one response; all responses were tabulated according to the percentage and number of teacher respondents.

Table 17: Features that Make your Teaching Christian

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 41 Teachers	%	#
Teaching from a Christian perspective.	93	38
Attempting to model Christ in all things.	68	28
Participating and leading devotions, prayer and Bible study in class.	15	6
Daily struggle and challenge (with students) to live Christianly.	12	5

Features that make a Christian teacher's teaching Christian (see Table 17)

An overwhelming percentage of teacher respondents (93%) indicate that teaching from a Christian perspective is what makes their teaching Christian. This Christian perspective is a personal worldview:

> My faith is woven into what we study. When you teach about environment issues, friendship or nutrition it is impossible not to look at what God says about these issues. In Math, for example, God created patterns – God gave us the intelligence to see this and be awestruck.

Another teacher speaks about the "ability to critique topics from a scriptural point of view." Discussions regarding financial management hinge on our responsibility to be good stewards of our money. Also, in art appreciation, "Would a Christian paint like this? Why or why not? I demonstrate how stories of people's faith journeys, my own and others, can come out visually in artwork." These curricular activities are part of the challenges to be Christian in all areas of our lives.

Most teachers spoke of their passion for teaching from a Christian perspective. They are committed to their Christian beliefs and want to teach children within this context. For many teachers the very methods used in teaching, the ways and means in which they interact with students, the very atmosphere and community that they attempt to establish are all founded on a Christian, Biblical way of viewing the world and people in it. One teacher highlighted these key points. These are the "absolutes on which to build the foundation – everything I teach hinges on these truths: God is, God created, God sustains, God Cares (loves), I (you) matter, I (you) can make a difference, I (you) represent or image God on earth and God forgives." Another teacher said, "I wrestle with a way to make the curriculum relevant, to re-shape approaches and content to the students' needs or to re-evaluate how my subject touches culture." Many teachers talked about presenting God to the students as much as possible, whenever they can. A Christian perspective was woven into both curriculum methods and pedagogy, and into relationships. Community building was emphasized with a goal of teaching "problem solving in relationships by basing it on Biblical principles." Another teacher respondent admitted that to teach Christianly is to relate "what I teach and how I teach to the Word of God -- to the best of my ability."

Not only is it important to teach a Christian perspective in a Christian school, it is also important to live that way. The second major indicator, identified by 68% of the teacher respondents, is the attempt to model Christ in all things. In approaching discipline issues or dealing with students, one teacher wrote, "I try to use Christ's life as an example." Another said, "I try to be a model for my students in how I treat them." Modeling Christ's example, Christ's teachings and lifestyle, means interacting with others "in love, treating each child as an important unique child of God, accepting and respecting each child and identifying their own gifts." It means cultivating a "classroom attitude that is positive." Being patient, apologizing for errors and hurts and always attempting to live and relate to others by thinking first, "What would Jesus do?" are ways of modeling the Christian walk.

Besides the two major themes identified by teacher respondents, two other specific patterns were also observed. Participating and leading devotions, prayer and Bible study are overt ways to instil a Christian worldview in the minds and hearts of students. Choosing songs and literature with clear references to God point students in the direction of God. Deliberate prayers and devotions throughout the day "set the tone" for Christian teaching. Teachable moments are opportunities, at any time, where a Christian worldview can be the foundation of any discussion or circumstance. These are intentional occasions where teaching and guidance clearly inform and leads students to God. Direct learning about God and the Christian worldview are important aspects of teaching in a Christian school with a Christian perspective.

Finally, as a Christian teacher it is important that students see the teacher's lifestyle oriented toward the Christian perspective. About 12% of teacher respondents specifically identified their personal struggles and daily challenges to live Christianly as a component of what makes their teaching Christian. To openly allow students to see the personal struggles of the teacher and to share personal faith as well as doubts is to show students that Christianity is not a sugar coating on life; it is not a "God will solve all" kind of faith, but a daily struggle with issues and circumstances to respond faithfully to God. It means attending "lots of workshops to help (me) teach to a variety of learning styles." Christianity is about "being genuine about my own thoughts and feelings." It is sharing personal "examples and stories of our own spiritual journey… watching students' faith and knowledge grow." It is about being challenged or challenging students to think upon or live out Biblical principles and truths." In a variety of ways, teachers emphasized that their own personal, daily struggles are important aspects to Christian teaching. One teacher summed up the responsibility to "challenge students to live their faith -- being thorough, thoughtful and mindful that the entire world belongs to God, that we and students have a critical task to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God."

Summary and reflections on features that make teachers' teaching Christian

Teaching from a Christian perspective is clearly the most identified element that makes the teacher respondents perceive their teaching as Christian. Attempting to model this Christian lifestyle is also highly preferred. From a Christian perspective it makes sense not only for teachers to talk the talk but also to strive to walk the walk -- putting their words into action.

The distinctive feature of ECS is its claim to teach from a Christian perspective and live in a Christian manner. Thus, the teachers, the main workers towards this vision, must be committed to this vision. With this in mind, it would seem natural that teachers work at making Christian education a reality. Thus, it would be only natural to assume that they would identify or consider their teaching to be Christian because of their Christian worldview, integrated into education.

I can't help but wonder if the definitions or understandings about "teaching from a Christian perspective" are the same? How does each teacher know that he or she is fulfilling this mandate? What proof do they have and how do they measure their success at teaching with a Christian perspective?" These are all much bigger questions, beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, they are questions that teachers at ECS need to ask. This research deals only with the perceptions of the participants.

It is interesting to see that both teachers and parents indicate that the school's teaching is to be from a Christian perspective. To perceive it as such a high rate (98%) suggests that both parents and teachers perceive the same thing. One could assume, therefore, that ECS is educating students within a Christian perspective. But, the question still remains, how are parents and teachers individually measuring their perceptions?

Question 5: What is your greatest satisfaction with teaching at ECS?

Inherent in this question is the desire that teacher responses identify what personally makes them feel good about their teaching at ECS. Many teachers identified several factors; all of their responses have been recorded. Table 18 records the most obvious patterns observed in percentages and the number of teacher participants. Although there is a great deal of overlap, responses are separated to allow a more specific categorization.

Table 18: Teachers' Satisfaction with Teaching at ECS

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 41 Teachers	%	#
Freedom to teach Christianly.	39	16
To be a part of the common faith and life of the community.	39	16
Seeing students living the faith.	34	14
Seeing positive student relationships.	27	11
Seeing students worship God.	27	11
Community affirmation of my work and influence.	20	8
Positive and supportive staff relationships.	17	7

Teachers' greatest satisfaction in teaching at ECS (see Table 18)

The freedom to teach Christianly was identified by 39% of the teacher respondents as the greatest satisfaction in teaching at ECS. Teachers found openly declaring and sharing a life of love and service to God rewarding. One teacher expanded on this to say her delight was "the freedom to present Christian information, encourage Christ-like relationships and to guide behaviours consistent with our Christian faith." Another teacher expressed pleasure in the "freedom to worship and learn in an environment that encourages students to develop their God-given gifts and to live for God and serve in God's world." "Being able to plant seeds in the children's hearts and to know that God will take these seeds and do wonderful things with them," is "my greatest satisfaction," said another teacher. Many teacher respondents' thoughts are summed up by one teacher who spoke of his greatest satisfaction, "the opportunity to do what I love doing in a Christian and appreciative community."

Some teachers found satisfaction in the fact that this community is composed of students who are receptive to Biblical teachings, and students and alumni who understand what the teachers try to teach; these same community members continue the struggle to live out their faith. These are "loving, caring God-serving parents." To be a part of this community and to share a common faith were identified as great satisfactions. Clearly, this is substantiated throughout the other data collected. ECS was portrayed as a Christian community dedicated to Christian education. This, for many teacher respondents in this study, made teaching a worthwhile task.

Being part of this community, some more experienced teachers expressed satisfaction at seeing students living the faith both as students and then, later, as adults. Other teachers delighted in "watching the students grow up to be committed, effective Christians" and in seeing "faith responses in words and actions that are produced in unsolicited ways and in new areas of life and learning." "Being a part of a child's faith journey is truly a delight," said one teacher. Some teacher respondents felt Christian growth was a personal benefit. One teacher expressed that she personally grows in her own faith and learns from her students. "Guiding students to see the challenge of being a Christian and having them respond with confidence" is very rewarding. Just being a part of the student's Christian growth, seeing their "connections between learning, faith and sharing with others" and "seeing the growth and responses of children in their relationship with God" is gratifying. This opportunity "to make a difference in a life" and to see Christian growth was viewed as one of the greatest satisfactions to teaching at ECS.

Many teachers talked about relationship building as a rewarding aspect of teaching at ECS. Teachers reported that when positive student relationships developed between adults and students and between students and students, this was a rewarding experience. Community building was discussed in the surveys as an important aspect of Christian education; when these relationships worked out, success was achieved. Learning how to live together and striving to do so, loving and forgiving each other, was viewed as quite an accomplishment.

Other teachers suggested that seeing students build a relationship with God is gratifying. Getting to know students on a personal, more intimate level and seeing them attend and participate in worship services was also a satisfaction. Another teacher said, "seeing and hearing children express their faith and love for God is rewarding." For most teachers, to see their students learn to celebrate their life in God and to praise God "at any time of the day, wherever, whenever…" was a satisfying experience, a result of teaching in a Christian school.

About 20% of the teacher respondents took satisfaction from the fact that they had received at some time or another, community affirmation of their work and influence as a teacher. As a teacher, experience suggested that sometimes this affirmation came from parents of students in the class or from grown students who returned to speak to the teacher. One teacher spoke of "having students and parents come back, years later, to mention how ECS and my teaching has impacted their lives. These can be powerful moments."

Finally, a few teacher respondents took satisfaction from the positive and supportive staff relationships they experienced at ECS. These relationships were seen as most rewarding when "surrounded with a like-minded, faithful, supportive staff." One teacher commented on her positive relationship with "dedicated staff members" who she "really looks forward to working and socializing with, even after a long summer break." One teacher aptly summed up the comments inherent in many teacher responses towards receiving satisfaction working with supportive colleagues:

> A sense of purpose, a common commitment… a freedom and professional trust, a collegiality, a collaboration. I don't need to hide my faith and doubts or pretend it is more vibrant than it is. I can admit my vulnerability. I am encouraged and supported in professional development.

Clearly, for various reasons, many teachers have a personal satisfaction with teaching at this school.

Summary and reflections concerning satisfactions for teachers

Teacher respondents did not seem to have difficulty identifying satisfying elements in their teaching at ECS. The freedom to teach with a Christian perspective out of their own personal worldview and their delight in being part of a greater community that shared a common faith clearly seemed to be the strongest factors to teaching at ECS. This seems to be consistent with teachers' desire to teach in a Christian school, the ability to teach the Christian perspective and be a part of a community of like-faith. Also, these results fit with the number of teacher respondents who believe their teaching is Christian because they do teach from a Christian perspective. My study supports the point that the Christian perspective and the integration of the Christian worldview into life and learning are key elements at ECS.

All other themes mentioned in this question tend to relate to Christian teaching and the Christian community. Positive colleague relationships, positive student relationships and the development of a relationship with God are all relational components of Christian education at ECS. The affirmation and sense of satisfaction was most obvious when teachers felt affirmed, either directly because someone has verbally commented on their work and efforts or indirectly by observing the healthy Christian growth observed in students. The satisfaction was predominantly felt by recognizing that efforts have led others, and even one's self, into a closer relationship with God; this was seen as the ultimate purpose of Christian education.

Question 6: What is your greatest disappointment with teaching at ECS?

Teacher respondents were asked to identify factors and situations that have been disappointing to them as teachers at ECS. To varying degrees these may be seasonal disappointments although some may be ongoing. Many teachers listed more than one disappointment. All results are tabulated and the responses are presented in Table 19 according to the percentage and number of teacher participants.

Teachers' greatest disappointment with teaching at ECS (see Table 19)

The responses of teachers suggest that the very Christian community they desired to please may become their greatest disappointment. About 20% of teacher respondents felt community expectations were unreasonable and that demands were too great. One teacher said, "Parents expect extra-curricular time on weekends and evenings."

Table 19: Teachers' Greatest Disappointment with Teaching at ECS

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 41 Teachers	%	#
Community expectations that are unreasonable; high demands.	20	8
Complacency in parents and students in living for God.	20	8
Lack of time; things are too fast paced.	17	7
Politics (EPS) and administration (ECS) is a concern.	15	6
Colleagues are not as friendly or supportive as they could be.	15	6
Lack of respect amongst students and parents.	12	5
Not enough time for staff self-care and nurture.	12	5
Lack of resources.	8	4
Lack a voice in decision-making and vision setting that counts.	8	4
Effectiveness is limited.	8	4

Several teachers were concerned by the expectations of community for "teachers to keep giving beyond their personal resources. A true community would not lay such a huge burden on one person's feet." One teacher spoke of the "inability of some parents to get what I'm trying to do." Other teachers spoke of the "overwhelming expectations… as to responsibility for student learning and behaviour and faith life." The burden of helping students grow up is assumed to be the task of the Christian teacher, a task that encompasses all aspects of the student's life. Teachers claimed they simply could not be solely responsible and that the expectations are unrealistic.

For some teachers, complacency in parents and students was a huge disappointment. The failure to make a difference in a life, to not see young people grow in their personal understanding of and love for God, is a great discouragement. With the changing times in our world it "becomes increasingly difficult to be a relevant part of these students lives. There are so many voices for them to listen to." This "inability to reach certain kids" and to have "students who just don't care" is very difficult to accept. One teacher said he'd rather have a student "tell me to F-off than not to care." Teachers identified complacency as always hard to deal with, not just at the student-teacher level but at the parent level as well. Another teacher suggested, "The strength of community can also be its weakness. When pressure groups push an agenda or when parents do not become involved because they assume everything is OK." To be a part of community means to be involved. Some teachers felt that other teachers lacked passion in working with colleagues "to develop common initiatives and themes" in the curriculum. Again, complacency, on some level or another, was a disappointment.

In this study, teachers recognized that time were an issue. There was never enough time to do things – too much busyness, too many things to do, an increasing workload, a hectic pace, and the amount of time taken in the evening to do school work; these were problems for many teachers. School and work demands have taken time away from one's family and personal leisure time. Like most teachers, time was considered to be at a premium and still demands were being made.

The effects of school government and the procedures for operating the school disappointed some teachers. One teacher claimed she "did not expect to find the bureaucracy of a school, politics, to be to this extent in a Christian school." In talking about this issue, teachers expressed disappointments that "since becoming part of EPS we are being governed top-down rather than grassroots up," or "as a part of EPS we are given high expectations and extra stresses." One teacher expressed the concern that "to survive as a Christian school we would have to join EPS." Others were concerned about "being forced into thinking and acting like three campuses are one school… I find it all rather artificial." Some teachers expressed concerns and even worry "about our faithfulness. Will we continue to point to God even if it is not politically correct to do so?" Another teacher felt "our relationship with EPS makes demands that may be consistent -- but because of the immediacy of every demand, we aren't able to consider the consistencies or inconsistencies." This teacher went on to question whether we are not compromising our Christian vision in such areas as student evaluation, staff pay and involvement and specialist teaching. Other concerns suggest that administration makes evaluative judgments on teachers based solely on student or parent comments. One teacher simply said, "We are too caught up with logistics." Clearly, some teachers were disappointed with the political workings.

At the same time, several teachers expressed disappointment with colleagues. Some teachers felt that staff interaction was negative, at times. There is a "lack of support from some colleagues," or we are "not together (united) as we could or should be." Others reported a "lack of love, selfishness on the part of some," and disrespect "amongst staff and administration in some situations." One teacher claimed, "Gossip is rampant at our school, teachers talking about teachers." The question was asked, "If we cannot support each other's weaknesses, how can we teach our students to do so?" Relationships with colleagues were considered an important part of a school community. Some teachers had concerns and disappointments in this area.

Closely connected to relationships with colleagues was the perception of lack of respect. This lack of respect extended to students, parents and staff. One teacher suggested "familiarity and lack of respect among some of the students both challenge the very vision we claim as well as make our teaching difficult." It is "frustrating to see students who know the talk but have difficulty walking the walk." Parents also were identified as disrespectful of other parents, teachers and students. One teacher spoke about "spending too much time dealing with negative behaviour among students and having too many fires to put out, due to student misbehaviours." The way community members can be hurtful to one another and disrespectful to each other in many situations was a disappointment to teachers.

Teacher self-care was another concern for some teacher respondents. Teachers reported they did not have enough time to do their work and care for their own needs. Thus, their families and self suffered. One teacher stated, "We need to relax a bit and not be so hung up on proving ourselves." Teachers say there is "not enough time to listen deeply, understand, support, reflect on teaching, the students or self. We need to work less and take time for other important things in our lives." Teachers also felt that they needed to feel more appreciated and have a sense of self-worth from their jobs. This "valuing of self" needs to be restored.

About 8% of teacher respondents identified three other, not so important, but noteworthy elements of dissatisfaction. A few teachers felt there were not enough "resources to meet all the needs of the students." Others felt there was a "lack of communication in the decision making between staff and administration." One teacher said, "I increasingly don't feel that I'm part of any decision making process. I feel helpless to change what I don't like." Finally, other teachers felt limited in their effectiveness as Christian teachers. One teacher spoke honestly and personally, "My actions fall so short from where I wish they would be." Another teacher expressed disappointment, "when 'the world' can't tell we're a Christian school." This disappointment was reflected in behaviour or actions that were not living up to Christian standards. Since the vision of this Christian school is to be distinctively Christian, any failure to do so was disappointing.

Summary and reflections concerning teachers' greatest disappointment with teaching

This question did not seem to be as easy for teachers; some were careful to clarify that their degree of satisfaction was far greater than their dissatisfaction. This seems to be evident in the data resulting from the other questions. The teacher respondents identify teaching freely with a Christian perspective and the positive, supportive, common-faith community as great satisfactions to their teaching. Seven themes were identified with 17% to 39% of teacher respondents listing any of these elements. Within this question, eleven themes were identified with 8% to 20 % of teacher respondents listing one of these elements. A simple comparison suggests that there are, indeed, far less dissatisfactions than satisfactions. Or, the degree to which teachers are dissatisfied is far less than the degree to which they are satisfied. The greatest dissatisfaction (20%) is only 3% above the lowest identified satisfaction.

This question employed a greater number of themes to identify the dissatisfactions of teachers. As individuals, I assume that teachers responded based on their personal experience. Within these parameters there is such a large range of disappointments from personal failures to the failings of any or all other people connected to the Christian school and community. Nevertheless, these disappointments are hurts or struggles that Christian teachers in this school deal with on a personal or group level. They are not unimportant. It would seem that the most common concern was that teachers felt somewhat over-worked and stressed because of the perceived community expectations placed upon them. They lack time and resources and feel a lack of support or nurture from administration and/or the ECS Board. Complacency in parents or students was a drawback as well. Feeling the passion for Christian education, teachers were then disappointed that certain people in the community did not seem to have that same passion.

Finally, relationships played a significant role. As a community striving towards a vision of Christian education, undoubtedly numerous relationships occur along the way. My experience as a teacher suggests that living in community is one of the hardest tasks in life. Living in a Christian community is perhaps even more difficult because the Christian faith also brings with it a culture of behavioural norms that are distinctive. There may be a common talk and a common vision, but the walk – the working out of that vision – is often fraught with challenges. No wonder relationships are often perceived as disappointments.

Student Participants

Students surveyed received only one survey, a questionnaire (Appendix E). Approximately 150 students from grade 8 to 12, registered in this 2000-2001 academic school year, were surveyed. One class of each grade was chosen to be part of the survey sample. Some students did not return their parental consent form and therefore could not be part of the in-class survey. None of the grade 12 students received parental consent to participate in the study. Therefore, they could not be included in the analysis. Table 20 shows the campus representation for the student surveys.

Table 20: Campus Representation for the 109 Student Survey

Campus Represented	% of Completed Questionnaires	# of Completed Questionnaires
West campus (Grades 8 & 9)	39	43
Northeast campus (Grades 8 & 9)	38	41
Senior campus (Grades 10 & 11)	23	25

Table 21 indicates that most surveys completed were done by grade 8 and 9 students. Both the West and Northeast campuses have junior high students; a grade 8 and 9 class was surveyed from each campus. The grade 10 and 11 classes were not large; the Senior High students represent a great number fewer students surveyed simply because there are fewer Senior High students than Junior High students in our whole school.

Table 21: Divisions Represented by 109 Students Surveyed

Grade Level of the Students	% of Students who Completed the Questionnaire	# of Students who Completed the Questionnaire
Grade 8	32	35
Grade 9	45	49
Grade 10	13	14
Grade 11	10	11

Table 22 indicates the number of years students have attended ECS. Most of the students surveyed have been in attendance at ECS for over six years. This means that they have experienced Christian education at ECS in at least two or three grade levels and many of them have attended this school all their life.

Table 22: Number of Years 109 Students Attended ECS

Years Attending ECS	% of Students	# of Students
Less/equal to 2 years	10	11
3 to 5 years	15	16
6+ years	72	78

When considering the worldview of the student community surveyed, it is important to understand the denominational affiliation of the families to which these students belong. Table 23 gives a detailed representation of the students' perceived church affiliation. Approximately 83% of the students indicated a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) affiliation. Other students belonged to a variety of different denominations. The most common non-CRC affiliations included Alliance, Catholic and Baptist. A few students indicated "Christian" as their affiliation with no particular church denomination mentioned. Still, a large number of denominations were represented under the category of "other;" these included Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, 7th Day Adventist and Orthodox. A small number of students claimed no church affiliation at all.

Table 23: Student Respondents' Denominational Affiliation

Student Respondents Represented by Church Affiliation at ECS	% of Students	# of Students
Christian Reformed Church	82	89
Other	5	6
Alliance Church	4	5
Catholic Church	4	4
"Christian"	3	3
Baptist	2	2

Responses from Student Questionnaire: What makes ECS a Christian School?

Question 1: Why do you think your parents send you to a Christian school?

Students at ECS believed their parents send them to a Christian school for specific reasons. Some respondents stated more than one reason; all reasons were recorded. Table 24 portrays the top five reasons why students believed parents send them to a Christian school. A few students did not like this question, assuming that they were in attendance at a Christian school because their parents sent them. Several students indicated it was their choice to be at a Christian school; they proceeded to name the reasons why they chose to attend a Christian school.

Table 24: Perceived Reasons why Parents send Students to a Christian School

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 109 Students	%	#
A Christian perspective is provided in education.	61	67
It is a good Christian environment in which to attend school.	61	67
We are led to develop a personal relationship with God for all of life.	29	32
My family is Christian and we want to grow up to be Christian.	12	13
It is what my parents did – why break tradition?	11	12

Reasons for attending Edmonton Christian School (see Table 24)

Upon analysis, students identified two major reasons as to why they attend a Christian school. About 61% perceive that the Christian perspective is a key reason. The integration of the Christian perspective into all their education is seen to be of great importance. Other students attend ECS because it has a good Christian environment. In other words, most students perceived that the faith integration and the Christian atmosphere are important to the parents. Connected to the integration of the Christian perspective to all of life is the perception by some students that they are at ECS specifically to be guided into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This development is a spiritual growth not just set aside for church on Sunday but a growth that is to be practiced and developed each day.

Finally, a few students specifically stated they were at a Christian school so that they would grow into mature Christians. This concept was connected to the parents' desire that their children receive an education consistent with family beliefs. Believing that God is Lord of all life would mean educating within this Christian perspective in order to assimilate this learning into all aspects of one's life. Some students recognized that their attendance at a Christian school was partially based on tradition. Their parents were educated within this Christian perspective and they, in turn, are to be educated accordingly. These students saw the heritage, the pattern, of Christian education that had been established in their family. It was not just a belief, but also a way of living, passed down from generation to generation.

Summary and reflections on students' perceptions as to why parents send children to a Christian school

I was especially interested in the reaction by several students who wanted to assure me that attending a Christian school was their personal choice, not just a decision made by parents. In retrospect, this may have been a good question to ask all students. Knowing that junior high and senior high students often have a lot to say about which school they attend, it would be interesting to see how many students felt they actually had a choice. A few students went so far as to say that their parents had preferred a different school, but they chose ECS.

The student respondents and parents identified the same reasons for attending ECS. The Christian perspective, the Christian community and the Christian atmosphere are strong motivators. Again, I was somewhat surprised by the student wording that one of the reasons for attendance at ECS is to "develop a personal relationship with God."

Finally, I was intrigued by the perceptiveness of students who recognized tradition as playing a role in their attendance at ECS. Throughout the survey, many students expressed pride in their Dutch culture and heritage. Attending the Christian school is one aspect of their heritage.

Question 2: What features make ECS a Christian school?

Many students expressed various features that make ECS a Christian school. Some of these expressions were quite general statements; however, many students gave examples and specified how ECS is a Christian school. All responses were recorded with the specifics explaining the more encompassing concepts. Table 25 indicates the eight features.

Features that make ECS a Christian School (see Table 25)

Ultimately 50% of the students perceived ECS as a Christian school because the Christian faith was integrated into all areas of their school lives; they expressed this in a general statement of belief. At the same time many students named specifics. About 45% of the students spoke about Bible studies and devotions as an integral part of every day and week. This is an overt teaching of the Christian faith; it is direct study of God's word with a response to God. Some students specifically identified chapel and assemblies as occasions to learn about God, while others spoke of worship as a means of communally responding to God. For them, worship included singing and praying together. A few students specifically stated: "We learn a lot about God." This clear and definite teaching is learning about God and learning about God's world.

Table 25: Features that Make ECS a Christian School

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 109 Students	%	#
A Christian perspective is provided throughout our education.	50	55
Bible studies and devotions are important parts of the day/week.	45	49
It is a good Christian environment to grow up in.	38	41
Christian teachers teach us about God and life.	29	32
We learn a lot about God.	28	30
We pray and sing together – worship God together.	24	26
Chapel and assemblies teach us about God.	20	22
It is a safe, secure school.	2	2

Within this Christian learning environment, 38% of the students identified the atmosphere as a good Christian environment in which to grow up. Such identifications were often supported with references to a loving and caring community, Christian friends and Christian influences. One student talked about the death of her sibling a number of years ago. The school put plaques in the hall to remember this child. This student said, "the school seems like a community where everyone shares everything." Another student talked about the influences being good ones, "Being around Christian people makes it easier to make good decisions and there are not as many bad influences. I can see God in people's lives and it helps me in my own life."

Common beliefs are seen by some students as a benefit because they "allow us a chance to learn more about God" and relate better to their students. Some students spoke about field trips and getting along with everyone; others talked about how welcome and accepted they felt when they began attendance at ECS. Several students identified the Peer Support program as a benefit in a Christian school. The education received through this program taught the participants how to relate better to students in need or experiencing difficulty. One student said, "I am part of this team and it has changed the way I look at relating to others. I am continuing to help make everyone's lives around me become better." Another student said, "Sometimes you see people who do good things, not to be noticed, but just because. You can see God in them." One student summed up her view of the environment at ECS: "We live in a loving environment and I feel lucky to be a part of it." Other students suggest that although the environment is good it is not perfect, "Humans are sinful by nature and we are learning to live in and love our world and it's Creator."

Finally, about one-third of the student population believe that Christian teachers are an important feature of ECS because, as educators, they teach about God and model Christ to the students. One student claims, "I think teachers play one of the biggest roles in a Christian school. The kindness that the teachers try to show helps a lot to show that we are a Christian school."

Summary and reflections on features that make ECS a Christian School

Clearly the integration of a Christian perspective into education seems to be the primary feature of ECS. To break this larger theme into smaller components was interesting; it allowed me to see how the students interpret the integration of a Christian perspective.

Often these words are used, "a Christian perspective." I wondered if the students could articulate this in the form of stories or examples. Many students did so. They expressed their understanding to be how God is talked about in all areas of school life; God is talked about in their subject areas such as art, science and social studies. Also, attention is drawn to God in their extra-curricular events, such as sports and, they especially noticed this if they are active participants on sports teams. Students indicated experiencing conversations with teachers and others about God and how to live as a Christian that is directly related to their relationships. Ultimately, they identified explicit teachings about God, such as in Bible studies, chapels and assemblies. They also noticed the more subtle integration of a Christian belief system in their relationships such as Peer support programs and in their friendships with their peers. Many students were able to identify the Christian perspective as a major feature at ECS.

Question 3: What features hinder the effectiveness of ECS?

Within the student population there were varied responses to the question about features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS. Many students expressed the feeling that what they considered weaknesses or hindrances were, in actuality, quite small in comparison to the positives. In comparing the actual percentage of students that expressed concerns, one can pinpoint one major theme. About 45% of the student population felt that disrespect for each other was the greatest negative to Christian education. The remaining concerns mentioned were named by less than 18% of the population and some of them by very few of the people. Table 26 reveals the features that hinder Christian education at ECS.

Features that hinder the effectiveness of ECS (see Table 26)

The most predominant concern noted was relational -- the perceived disrespect that students show each other. This respect takes the form of put downs, bully behaviour, lack of care for each other and the inability to treat all people in a Christ-like fashion. One student said, "Sometimes the school doesn't seem very Christian. A lot of gossiping, fights, anger and hurt occur. Some people don't seem to care… It shows that maybe not everyone here is Christian, but there are those that care."

Table 26: Features that Hinder the Effectiveness of ECS

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 109 Students	%	#
Disrespect for each other – bullies who bully others.	45	49
Negative peer pressure to be like EPS; people who are not Christian.	17	19
School rules are too strict; need more "freedom."	7	8
Too few denominations represented; need more variety, more "open."	7	8
Christian perspective not taught in every subject.	5	5
Not using this time to "convert" those who are not Christian.	4	4
Inconsistent discipline.	3	3
Lack adequate funding; need more resources.	2	2
Too many non-Christian substitute teachers come in.	2	2
Fighting amongst students.	1	1

Another student spoke of the cliques that seem to exist, "Most of the kids are already in a social circle." It makes it hard for new kids "to fit in."

It was suggested that sometimes everything you do or say can be picked on by others. One student proposed that economic differences cause barriers, "It's kids of the rich on top and the others below them. It's hard to keep up with people with money. There are definite outsiders." Some students commented about the non-Christian behaviour of "swearing, talk about getting drunk and so on." Clearly, this Christian school "isn't above the teasing and harassment, which is what most people believe is true about Christian schools." Many students recognized that, although it is a Christian school, in many ways there remain many elements that are non-Christian, especially in the way students relate to each other.

A second factor that hinders the effectiveness of ECS was the perception that, since joining EPS, there has been an influence of new students that impacted ECS. These new students create a peer pressure that makes it "not cool" to be Christian. In this case, the students who previously chose and tried to live a Christian life are influenced to hide their beliefs or at least tone down their enthusiasm for being a Christian. These influences were felt to come from the new students who were unfamiliar with a Christian school and a Christian education or who did not want to appear different from their student peers in the public school. This negative influence was a concern to those who find peer pressure against "being Christian" a detriment to the Christian environment at ECS.

A number of other minor concerns were mentioned. Some students felt the rules were "too strict" and that, in the public school, a student is given more freedom to leave the school grounds and do what they want to do. Other students commented that the Dutch cultural influence was too strong. One student said, "In all my classes, Dutch heritage is consistently mentioned. I think the school assumes people are Dutch and it often feels like its a Dutch school. ... other people should be welcome too." Some students felt there could be more integration between Christian faith and some subjects taught, while others said more emphasis should be placed on "converting those who are not Christian."

Some students wanted a greater emphasis and more talk about developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Still others spoke of a lack of discipline; teachers are not strict enough on negative behaviour. Also, a concern was expressed about some substitute teachers who are not Christian. And, the lack of funding was seen as preventing more resources such as computers, option programs and/or help for struggling students.

Summary and reflections on features that hinder the effectiveness of Christian education at ECS

Without a doubt, relationships are the biggest problem to what students perceive life should be like in a Christian school. "Disrespect" was a word used frequently. I was amazed how many students spoke openly about their disappointments in this area. But, many tempered their remarks with the knowledge that "we are all human;" just because ECS is a Christian place does not mean it has achieved perfection. As an adult and an educator, one must be impressed with the observant perceptions of which these students are capable. Nevertheless, the aspect of disrespect remains a concern.

Identifying the factors that hinder Christian education at ECS was not enough for many students; they proceeded to express their opinions about how improvements could be made. Some advocated that a variety of Christians be welcomed and encouraged to become part of the school. They wanted to see more non-Dutch and more non-Christian Reformed students in the school.

At the same time, ongoing issues in Christian education were identified. Struggles and challenges for teachers in the area of discipline were addressed. Also, the controversy over whether Christian education is about education or for the purpose of conversion was noted. In retrospect, students were far more articulate than I had suspected. However, in analyzing the surveys, the greater degree of clear articulation was most obvious in the older students.

Question 4: What are some ways in which teachers are Christian teachers?

Students were adamant that their teachers at ECS are Christian teachers. Several important reasons seemed to emerge and most students identified more than one way in which teachers are Christian teachers. All reasons are recorded in table 27 according to the percentage and number of participant responses.

Table 27: Ways in Which Teachers are Christian Teachers

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 109 Students	%	#
They model Christ in their words and actions.	50	55
Teachers provide clear Christian teaching in and out of classes.	45	49
Teachers put a Christian perspective in studies they teach.	43	47
Teachers share with students their own personal faith journey.	32	35
Teachers give personal/individual attention/caring to students.	31	34
Teachers encourage student faith development.	13	14

Ways in which teachers are Christian teachers at ECS (see Table 27)

The strongest evidence for Christian teachers was that they "model Christ in their words and actions." About 50% of the students claimed that their teachers talk the talk and walk the walk. Specifically 45% of the students indicated this is obvious in the "clear Christian teaching received in and out of classes." Other students talked about teachers "integrating a Christian perspective in studies that they teach."

Not only do the teachers teach and model a Christian lifestyle, they also share personally with the students. Students reported that these teachers walked the Christian journey with their students. The teachers also struggled with life issues and shared how they too were challenged and attempted to deal with "being a Christian" and "living a Christ-like life." Some students were even more specific. They claimed teachers, "encourage student faith development." For them, this was not just teaching about God and if this faith development happens, it happens; the teachers' choices were deliberate attempts to encourage and motivate students, leading students to develop in their Christian faith.

Without a doubt teachers were seen by students to be a major part of what is Christian at ECS. For students, part of being Christ-like was to recognize the unique characteristics of each person and to strive to give attention to individuals as God's children. This, for students, was modeling Christ and being Christian.

Summary and reflections on ways in which teachers are Christian teachers

The measurement of what makes a Christian teacher was of interest to me. The students basically echoed what their parents indicated on their questionnaires; modelling Christ was the greatest influence, obviously. Being able to live what you teach was vital to success in transmitting a Christian worldview and lifestyle to students.

Interestingly, many students possessed the ability to break down into smaller reasons what made a Christian teacher. I expected to see general references to kind, loving, caring individuals who could and should also exemplify most educators in the profession. Instead, students who made reference to kind, caring teachers, also indicated specific ways that the Christian perspective was disseminated, such as in the sharing of faith journeys and the development of a Christian faith in students. Ultimately, these students seemed to recognize that teachers were human and were allowed to make mistakes. However, these Christian teachers did, in fact, strive to teach as Christian teachers. And, they have, to varying degrees, achieved some success.

Question 5: What are some ways in which teachers are not Christian teachers at ECS?

Realizing that teachers are human, students reported that there were ways in which Christian teachers did not act Christ-like. About 17% of the students responded in this way, acknowledging that teachers were human and, therefore, must have some faults. Some students had more difficulty responding to this question; about 18% simply said they could not think of any ways their teachers were not Christian. Many wanted to assure the researcher that they had a hard time finding ways in which teachers are not Christian; but, if they had to answer this question, these were some of their responses, as shown in table 28.

Ways in which teachers are not Christian teachers at ECS (see Table 28)

The most commonly identified way in which students noted teachers as not acting in a Christian way was in the giving of putdowns, some of which were considered to be

Table 28: Ways in Which Teachers are Not Christian Teachers at ECS

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 109Students	%	#
Give putdowns – subtle and not so subtle.	25	27
Can't think of any ways they are not Christian.	18	20
Being human; we all sin.	17	18
They lose their temper or get angry with students.	14	15
Inconsistent in the way they treat students.	9	10
Gossip or talk about students with other students, etc.	8	9
Show favouritism.	4	4
Need to listen more and receive student input into things.	3	3

subtle and some that were not so subtle. About 25% of the students had experienced this personally or had witnessed their friends or classmates in these situations. In the survey, there tended to be one certain class of students where this response was particularly noted, although it was occasionally mentioned in other classes and student responses.

Some students considered that their teachers lose their temper or get angry with students, while others felt that some teachers are inconsistent in the way they treat students. A few suggested that teachers gossip or talk about certain students with other students. These were perceived as unchristian actions on the part of the teachers.

A few students identified some other factors as unchristian. Some teachers appear to show favouritism and, at times, failed to give individual help to those struggling academically. A few students indicated that teachers needed to listen more to what the students had to say, especially concerning discipline situations and in places where the students want to have more freedom. Also, a very few students felt that teachers allowed students to show disrespect towards each other. They felt teachers could do something more about this problem.

Summary and reflections on ways in which teachers are not Christian teachers

After getting past their protestations that they really liked and respected their teachers, most students were able to suggest unchristian teacher behaviours. A solid 18% could not answer this question and still many others felt teachers were allowed to make mistakes; after all, it is impossible to be perfect.

On my initial analysis of this section I was quickly aware of a problem that appeared to be predominant in one class. Upon a closer look, I found that about 22% of the students who indicated that teachers gave put-downs were in one class. In addition to the sadness one feels when one ponders the implication of this finding, as a researcher I really wondered about this finding. Specifically, if this particular class had not been part of the study, the data for this comment would have been much smaller. As I read and considered the implications of my findings, I hoped that further probing would help me discover this apparent discrepancy or that an interview with a student from this class would help sort out this situation.

Question 6: Would you recommend ECS to other families or students?

Most students answered this question very briefly. Positive answers were clearly given with many "yes," "absolutely" and "why not" statements. Some students answered by giving a few specific reasons to support their affirmative answer. These reasons are tabulated in Table 29.

Table 29: Reasons for Recommending ECS as a Christian School

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 109 Students	%	#
Positive Christian atmosphere exists at ECS.	51	55
Teachers teach Christianly, with a Christian perspective.	28	30
There are great, Christian teachers.	14	15
It is a unique place that is important for a good education.	8	9
There are good options.	2	2
There are good service projects that one can be involved in.	1	1

Reasons for recommending ECS to other families or students (see Table 29)

The most popular two factors that emerged from this question identified the Christian atmosphere and the Christian teachers as the reasons for recommending ECS. About 51% of the students talked about the positive Christian atmosphere that exists at ECS. Approximately 42% of the students spoke specifically about the teachers: 28% of the students mentioned the teachers who teach Christianly, with a Christian perspective, and 14% simply stated that there are great, Christian teachers at ECS.

Other comments, of less frequency, considered the many activities available at ECS. According to these responses, students seemed to feel that a good education could be had at ECS. They also seemed to believe that ECS was also a place where there were some worthwhile options and service projects in which one can be involved.

Summary and reflections on reasons for recommending ECS

Once again the top three reasons that make ECS a Christian school were voiced: teaching from a Christian perspective, a Christian atmosphere and Christian teachers. These, by far, made up the majority of student responses. However, some students were most impressed by the activities and projects that put into action the Christian faith.

Question 7: What are some highlights of your time at ECS?

This was a general, wide-open question. I analyzed responses, seeking to find what experiences students would remember about ECS. Some students told stories and some made brief comments. Table 30 indicates the eight most frequently mentioned highlights of the time students have so far spent at ECS.

Table 30: Highlights of Time Spent at ECS

Statements (Responses) Suggested by 109 Students	%	#
Field trips and class trips.	30	33
Relationships with friends.	16	18
Sports events and sport teams.	13	15
Special days, spent at school.	8	10
Devotions together.	7	8
Personal accomplishments.	5	5
Relationships with teachers.	4	4
Service projects (for others).	2	2

Highlights of time spent at ECS (see Table 30)

The most common, vivid memories were fieldtrips away from the school. These may have been day trips or overnight trips; but these overnight trips had a lasting affect on the students. At ECS, field trips were taken for the purposes of exploring nature, developing survival skills or simply a time of bonding. One student said that "winter camp… helped me best understand God's wonderful creation. It taught me about surviving solely on food, shelter and God. The 'un-presence' of almost everything else helped me focus on God." These out-of-the-classroom experiences were vital for building relationships and being given the opportunity to see teachers in a different context. For students, these were another way teachers could teach and model a Christian lifestyle.

Other memorable events included celebrations or times spent together as a community. According to students, the camaraderie of field days and theme weeks helped build relationships. One student spoke of these special occasions: "they bring children together from all grades. When we cooperate, a sense of fun is emphasized over the competition." Other students spoke of carnival days, book week, game days, school plays and graduation days where students celebrated together. Other special day events might include: gum day, funky hair day, dress up day, dress down day and backwards day. These different events, although seemingly small and insignificant, helped to build community.

Some students mentioned sports events as the highlights of their time at ECS. Winning tournaments, playing championship games and participating in track and field events are especially remembered by the athletic students. One student's vivid memory was "being able to represent the school on a sport team for the first time."

Several students indicated that they remember chapels, singing and praying together. Devotional times were highlights for some students. One student said, "My teacher really seems to care about our Christian faith. He helps us every morning… singing… and doing devotions. I think it's really great." Another student talks about how impressed he was on his first day at this school, "After everyone had been introduced, we prayed. We never prayed at my old school!"

Part of the mission statement at ECS says that we will engage in "joyful service to God…" Service projects were another highlight identified by students that made fond memories. Raising money for worthy causes by holding wake-a-thons or fasting were memorable activities done with their teachers and friends. Collecting or donating items for those in need in their city or other places in the world expanded their awareness of other people and their situation and helped the students engage in joyful service.

For students, accepting one's own limitations or the limitations of others was often reported as a challenge. Overcoming difficulties became accomplishments students remembered. Several students remembered significant events or activities that may have appeared to be challenges but had been successful accomplishments. Some spoke of getting "good marks on my report card," or a time when "we had to climb some steep hills. I remember feeling really proud when I got to the top." Other students spoke of achieving goals they had set. Several students spoke of the acceptance of "disabled" students. They were impressed that, "Things are working very well. This shows how we accept everyone no matter how they look or act." This student "has been given a warm welcome and many students are willing to help him."

Without question, many students identified times with friends or teachers and the building of positive healthy relationships as the best time at ECS. One student said, "When fights happen people are usually willing to make up and tell others how they feel. They are able to forgive but not always forget." Another students claimed she would "always remember the feel of a tight-knit community where everybody was a part." Others talked about the caring people at ECS. One student mentioned the good welcome newcomers get at our school and that, "those efforts show a Christian attitude." One student expressed how people at ECS gave "lots of love" when there was a death in her family. Several students remembered teachers who clearly made an impact on their lives, sometimes by the way they taught. One student said his teacher, "brought life into our class studies and had the best demonstrations and candies." Or, other students referenced a teacher with great skills in a specific area, such as art. Another student recounted a life changing experience with a teacher and said, "I know one teacher has changed my life, and who I am, forever. And that I will never forget." Christian friends and time spent together were reasons students liked school.

Summary and reflections on the highlights of student memories about ECS

Schooling, for most students, is a place of work. That is to be expected. They go to school to learn and practice their new learning. This education may include new skills acquired, new concepts and thoughts understood or in the working together with other people to find solutions. For most students this work is not highly noteworthy in the course of an average day.

However, when there is a variation to the norm, students notice. In my experience, these events and situations become highlights for students. Thus it was with students at ECS. One student wrote about being impressed when she saw a slide show and listened to a song called, "Testify to Love." The presentation included pictures of people and events at ECS. To this student, "it just hit me that this is what ECS was trying to do: to testify to the greatest commandment of Jesus – to love. All the smiling faces and memories made me realize how much I loved and needed ECS, my Christian school."

The memories students identified as life-long are representative of the three themes constantly being linked to education in a Christian school: the integration of a Christian faith and perspective into all areas of life, the Christian teachers and friends and the Christian atmosphere. It is likely that the information presented in this section, more than any piece of data, is the real heart of what students remember and assimilate into their life. These are the lasting effects that education at ECS probably has on the students that attend.

In summary, this chapter has presented much detailed data collected from the parent, teacher and student questionnaires. Each item from the questionnaire has been interpreted and the results categorized into responses. My personal reflections are given in the attempt to provide a greater understanding about what makes ECS a Christian school. In the final analyses, these participant responses help me consider what is needed to improve my own practice of Christian teaching. At the same time, the results may be used to inform the ECS community so that, together, we work toward a better Christian education.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH THEMES, INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE RATING SCALE

In this chapter I present the results obtained from the rating scale surveys. These results add to the data from chapter 4 to begin to develop global themes that are examined extensively in chapter 7. A deliberate repetition of some of these findings occurs in this chapter, and again in chapter 7, because I want readers to see how the interpretations are grounded in the responses of parents, teachers and students.

In recording information written by the study participants, I have used quotes to highlight specific word choices that the respondents have used. However, even when quotation marks are not used, I have tried to adopt the speaking style of the respondent as a way of representing the person's insights as validly as possible.

Overview of the Rating Scale

My research has been based upon both qualitative and quantitative data. This chapter takes an in-depth look at the quantitative data collected. A rating scale survey was devised. This survey used information from the Vision (see Appendix B) and Mission (see Appendix A) Statements of Edmonton Christian School (ECS) to determine how parents and staff perceive ECS as a Christian school. As researcher, I then attempted to interpret these responses within my own experience of this community.

The results of the rating scale survey were intended to provide quantitative data to complement the qualitative data collected in the questionnaire and the interviews. All parents and teachers connected with ECS in the 2000 - 2001 school year were surveyed; students were not given the rating scale survey. The survey was divided into four main sections -- faith integration, relationships, teachers and academics; each section was assumed to be a feature of school education that might contribute to what makes ECS a Christian school. In each of the four categories, five affirmative statements were provided to which the participants were to respond. Respondents were asked to rate each statement on a five-point scale whereby they (a) strongly agreed, (b) disagreed, (c) neither agreed nor disagreed, (d) agreed, or (e) strongly disagreed with the statement.

Each statement and category was analyzed to determine the frequency of responses to particular statements. Results were recorded in the percentage of people rating each statement, accordingly. At this point, themes sometimes emerged that corresponded to other data collected. As researcher, I summarized the results from each statement and reflected on the numerical findings, attempting to interpret the results in the light of qualitative data collected.

Parent Participants

Out of 461 families in the ECS system, 191 families responded to the rating scale survey (Appendix F); this was a 41% response rate. As seen in Table 31, 32% of the second surveys were returned from Northeast campus families while 56% of these surveys were West campus families. About 11% of the surveys were from families whose children were in attendance at the Senior Campus. Approximately 9% of the parents responding to the rating scale survey were also teachers.

Table 31: Parent Representation by Campus

Campus representation	% of parents represented	# of parents represented
West campus	56	107
Northeast campus	32	61
Students only at Senior campus	11	21

Parents completing the survey had students in many different grade divisions, depending on the number of children attending ECS and their grade levels. As shown in Table 32, the primary, intermediate and junior high divisions are more strongly represented due to the fact that these are two separate campuses. The senior high is one campus with fewer students.

Table 32: Parent Representation by Division

Parents represented by division	% of parents	# of parents
Primary (Grades K, 1, 2 & 3)	46	88
Intermediate (Grades 4, 5 & 6)	37	71
Junior High (Grades 7, 8 & 9)	42	80
Senior High (Grades 10, 11 & 12)	29	55

ECS has been in existence for over 50 years. A number of families have had students in attendance at ECS for quite a number of years. Table 33 shows the percentage of parents whose children have been attending ECS for a certain number of years. Clearly, 46% of the parents have had children in attendance for six or more years. Approximately 32% of the families have children who have attended for two years or less; this would recognize young families with their first child just beginning Kindergarten or grade one. Also, counted in this number is the influx of new families to ECS since we have become an alternative Christian school as part of the Edmonton Public School Board; this event happened in 1999.

Table 33: Years Children have Attended ECS

Number of years children have attended ECS	% of parents	# of parents
Less/equal to 2 years	32	61
3 to 5 years	18	34
6 to 10 years	28	53
11+ years	18	34

Quite a number of families have been involved with ECS for many years. Some of them attended as students and now they are parents of children attending the school. Many have been involved on various committees or as volunteers. Approximately 70% of the parents felt they had a very good or excellent understanding about the school. Table 34 indicates how well parents believe they understand the operations of ECS.

Table 34: Degree that Parents Claim Knowledge of ECS

Parent knowledge of ECS	% of parents	# of parents
Excellent	20	58
Very Good	50	96
Good	23	44
Fair	5	10

Teacher Participants

Out of 54 teachers in the ECS system, 33 teachers responded to this rating scale survey (Appendix G); this was a 61% return rate. Approximately 68% of the teachers were full time and 32% were part time teachers. Table 35 indicates the percentage of returned surveys from each campus. About 61% of the respondents did not have any children attending ECS, while 39% of the teachers had children presently in the ECS system.

Table 35: Teachers Representation by Campus

Teacher representation by campus	% of teachers represented	# of teachers represented
West campus	33	11
Northeast campus	36	12
Senior high campus	21	7

Teachers who completed this survey had taught in various divisions. Of course many teachers had taught in more than one division, experiencing a greater number of educational settings and types of students. Table 36 reveals the percentage of teachers who taught in specific divisions as reflected on their rating scale survey results. It was obvious that many teachers taught at intermediate and junior high levels. The senior high campus had a much smaller population of students, while the Northeast and West campuses were two different campuses with students in the primary, intermediate and junior high divisions.

Table 36: Percentage of Teachers Who Taught at Various Divisions

Division taught	% of teachers	# of teachers
Primary (Grades K, 1, 2 & 3)	39	13
Intermediate (Grades 4, 5 & 6)	55	18
Junior High (Grades 7, 8 & 9)	76	25
Senior High Grades 10, 11 & 12)	24	8

Many of the teaching staff had been a part of the ECS community for years. Table 37 portrays the number of years these teachers were employed at ECS. Clearly, most of the teachers at ECS had been employed in this school for over 10 years. These educators were a well-established part of the ECS community.

Table 37: Number of Years Teachers Employed by ECS

Teaching years at ECS	% of teachers	# of teachers
Less/equal to 2 years	0	0
3 to 5 years	9	3
6 to 10 years	12	4
11 to 15 years	27	9
16+ years	42	14

Important to the survey result was the assumption that the teaching population had some understanding of the operations of ECS. Each teacher respondent indicated their own perception of how familiar they felt with ECS. Table 38 illustrates that most teachers felt they had a very good or excellent knowledge of the workings of ECS; only 37% felt that they had an excellent understanding of the school.

Table 38: Degree that Teachers Claim Knowledge of ECS

Teacher knowledge of ECS?	% of teachers	# of teachers
Excellent	37	12
Very Good	45	15
Good	12	4
Fair	0	0

Rating Scale Responses by Parents and Teachers

Table 39 to Table 46 display the results from the rating scales completed by parents and teachers. With responses from 191 parents and 33 teachers it would be fair to say that this data represents what was happening at ECS. Each statement dealt with a slightly different approach or emphasized a slightly different aspect of that topic. In this way one could determine if there were strengths and/or weaknesses within any particular topic.

For each topic, participants were given additional space to add comments or to explain their answers. These responses ranged from lots of information to simply completing the rating scale. Sometimes it was easy to identify reasons why respondents had answered as they did and other times the reason for such a response was unclear. Ultimately, there was plenty of information provided and a great deal of repetition in the results.

Faith Integration at Edmonton Christian School: Responses by Parents and Teachers

Faith Integration: Summary and Reflections

Statement #1: Students receive clear teaching from the Word of God to learn about God's activity in the world and our responsibility as God's people.

Without a doubt both parents (87%) and teachers (85%) perceived ECS to be accomplishing this goal. According to the data displayed in Table 39 and Table 40 about

Table 39: Parent Responses to Faith Integration at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 191 (parents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students receive clear teaching from the Word of God to learn about God's activity in the world and our responsibility as God's people.	1% 1 person	1% 2 people	6% 13 people	41% 78 people	46% 88 people
Students are encouraged to grow in faith, develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to share this Good News with others.	0%	5% 10 people	16% 31 people	44% 84 people	27% 52 people
Students are taught critical thinking while being given opportunity to discern between good and evil and to make informed Christian choices.	0%	5% 9 people	16% 31 people	46% 87 people	31% 58 people
Students are challenged to live a life of faith and joyful service to God, to their neighbours and throughout the world.	0%	1% 2 people	15% 29 people	46% 87 people	32% 61 people
Staff and students are able to confront sin, encourage restoration, promote reconciliation and healing.	0%	3% 8 people	32% 61 people	41% 79 people	16% 30 people

Table 40: Teacher Responses to Faith Integration at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 33 (teachers)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students receive clear teaching from the Word of God to learn about God's activity in the world and our responsibility as God's people.	0%	0%	9% 3 people	30% 10 people	55% 18 people
Students are encouraged to grow in faith, develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to share this Good News with others.	0%	6% 2 people	12% 4 people	61% 20 people	15% 5 people
Students are taught critical thinking while being given opportunity to discern between good and evil and to make informed Christian choices.	0%	0%	12% 4 people	58% 19 people	27% 9 people
Students are challenged to live a life of faith and joyful service to God, to their neighbours and throughout the world.	0%	0%	18% 6 people	42% 14 people	36% 12 people
Staff and students are able to confront sin, encourage restoration, promote reconciliation and healing.	0%	6% 2 people	30% 10 people	15% 5 people	12% 4 people

46% of the parent population and 55% of the teacher population strongly agreed with this statement, suggesting that this objective was very well met at ECS.

This result supported the analysis from the questionnaire. The perception by parents and teachers was that the integration of the Christian perspective into education was a major feature at ECS. This statement gave evidence to that perspective in that students receive clear teaching from the Word of God; that is, direct and deliberate instruction, mentioned by many parents and teachers as an important factor in Christian education. The Christian faith was perceived by respondents to be integrated into the subject matter of the curriculum. The content of curriculum was seen as God's activity in the world and students were challenged in their studies to respond as God's children. For one parent this was reinforced

> when our oldest child was in Kindergarten. They were learning about signs. I was driving my kids around one afternoon when he proceeded to tell me what some of the different signs on the road meant. He then asked me if I knew God's sign. When I asked him what it was, he said, 'the rainbow.' When I heard this I knew he was going to the right school.

Based on these results, it would seem, therefore, that parents and teachers perceived the integration of Christian education to be clearly happening at ECS.

Statement #2: Students are encouraged to grow in faith, to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to share this Good News with others.

These results, seen in Table 39 and 40, seem consistent with responses from the questionnaire. It appears that 71% of the parents and 76% of the teacher participants indicated that this objective was being met. About 15% of the teachers felt this objective was very well met, while approximately 27% of the parents felt a very fine job was being done. At the same time about 12% of the teachers and 16% of the parents were neutral in their assessment.

The purpose of Christian education as a means of faith development, toward a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, was not as strongly noticed, as was the integration of the Christian perspective into learning. Although almost three-quarters of the respondents agreed that students are encouraged to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ, there were some that could not agree.

Some respondents felt that personal faith development was not the main goal of the school, but rather the job of the church and home. If a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was developed incidentally, because of the Christian education, this was a wonderful by-product of the Christian school. These respondents felt that the more significant purpose of the school was to teach about God, to integrate the Christian perspective into the curriculum and to instil in the students a vision of God and God's activity in the world. On the other hand, there were some respondents that strongly believed the complementary goal. They advocated that Christian education was about integrating a Christian worldview into life and learning in order to develop the faith of the students and to encourage and strive towards helping students grow in their relationship with their God. What one expects from a Christian education and how one defines the purpose of the Christian school, would determine how one rated this statement.

This debate is ongoing. To what degree should a Christian school focus, on helping and encouraging students to develop a personal relationship with God? Some parents believed this evangelistic focus should be present; teachers and staff should strive to "convert" all students to God. However, others claimed this was a wonderful by-product, if it happens, but this important task is not the primary focus of a Christian school. Instead, it is viewed as the job of another Christian institution.

Statement #3: Students are taught critical thinking while being given opportunity to discern between good and evil and to make informed Christian choices.

The discrepancy between teacher and parent perceptions seemed to be slightly greater in this statement, as indicated in Table 39 and 40. About 85% of the teachers thought this objective was being met, with 27% of those teachers believing it was very well met. Approximately 77% of the parents indicated that this objective was met, while 31% felt it was well met. Interestingly, about 16% of the parents and 12% of the teachers felt neutral in their analysis of this statement while 8% of the parents felt it was not happening at all.

Throughout the written responses there were references to critical thinking as an important objective in Christian education. One parent wrote:

> When my children leave school I pray that they will be equipped to challenge whatever ideas and concepts are put in front of them. I want them to develop a reformed ideology. But, more than that, I want… my children to challenge what they have been taught. Education is so often seen as feeding students with information and ideas that the system feels is the truth. I feel it is important for education to equip the students with a willingness to challenge ideas, even Christian ones and in the setting of Christian education guide the student to think about the way God would want them to interpret these ideas. A student who is encouraged to think for him or herself, using the Bible as an anchor point, has a better chance at becoming a strong Christian leader for their generation. If they are not encouraged to think and challenge, then they will become good followers. Our job as Christian… educators is to guide our children to grow up to become thinkers and leaders in Christ's name. Too often our children grow up becoming good Christian followers of secular thinking. Christian education should give the grounding for seeing life as God would have them see it, but with the ability to challenge all points of view even a popular Christian point of view. Learners become followers; thinkers become leaders.

Is it possible that the teachers, who are directly and personally involved in the delivery of Christian education, see more clearly their own efforts to include critical thinking skills into the program? One parent spoke of the need to be critical of the spirits of our time, the idolatry of

> scientism, technicism, moralism, commercialism, sexism and racism that are leading to the de-valuation of life; also, there is pollution, abortion, greed and materialism. Too often the approach to teaching critical thinking is reduced to moralism and does not involve the full scope of redemption in Christ.

The teaching of critical thinking is a more abstract kind of teaching. Maybe it is more difficult for parents to see these skills evident in their children. It is not a concept to be mastered easily; it takes a life time of practice.

However, it may be possible that only teachers thought they were meeting these criteria. In fact, the students, although exposed to critical thinking activities, might not be transferring this learning to other areas of their lives, more observable by parents. Ultimately, however, there were a large number of parents and teachers that perceived some success with this objective in the Christian education at ECS.

Statement #4: Students are challenged to live a life of faith and joyful service to God, to their neighbours and throughout the world.

Interestingly, 78% of both parents and teachers indicated that they perceived this objective was being accomplished. About 36% of the teachers and 32% of the parents believed this objective was very well met. Nevertheless, 18% of the teachers and 15% of the parents remained neutral in their assessment, as shown in Table 39 and 40.

The act of Christian service, projects and activities that benefit others, was mentioned many times by parents and students in their responses within the questionnaire. Reference was made to the many opportunities provided at ECS for students to participate in service projects that benefit the immediate community and people beyond the Christian community. In fact, some of the most significant memorable events indicated by students included those times where they served others. Some of these activities included wake-a-thons to raise money for "a community place where people help single mothers and their babies, cleaning up the countryside, serving at a soup kitchen, helping out at a daycare or school for the handicapped or simply giving of your own time and putting effort into doing something good to help someone else." One student commented on her positive impression about service projects, "I love doing this because it makes me feel good and it shows how much our school cares and helps others in the community."

However, there were a number of participants who perceived that even more effort is required in meeting this objective. Some felt the need to be more concentrated, with intentional activities to provide service for God and others.

Statement #5: Staff and students are able to confront sin, encourage restoration, promote reconciliation and healing.

Clearly Table 39 and 40 portray data to suggest that this goal received the greatest number of parent participants (35%) and teacher participants (36%) who did not believe this objective was being met. About 54% of the teachers and 57% of the parents believed this objective was being met while 16% of the parents and 12% of the teachers felt it was very well met.

In considering the overall data, the results were not surprising; they were consistent with other findings. This objective had to do with living out of relationships in a Christian manner. It meant building and maintaining a positive Christian community that dealt with misbehaviours and achieved healthy relationships evidenced by respect, love and care for each other. This was probably one of the most difficult objectives to fulfill. It involves ongoing, daily striving to be Christ-like in relationships.

This is a daily struggle. To say that ECS is a Christian place was interpreted by some people to mean that students, staff and parents have figured out how to live wholesome lives and be in good relationship with each other. To live in harmony with each other is a constant challenge.

Throughout all the data collected is the obvious recognition that being Christian is not the same as being perfect. Because people are human, they are imperfect. The result is brokenness. Recognizing brokenness and identifying the problem is the easy part; the hard part is fixing it or bringing healing and wholeness to that which is not healthy. Confronting the problem and finding a solution were clearly a struggle for all staff at ECS. Mixed into these discussions were ultimate questions of grace and/or judgment. Do we stick religiously to the rules and policies? Or, do we allow grace when rules have been broken? And then, how much grace? A parent once said that ECS had "too much grace and not enough law." A previous school she had been a part of had "too much law and not enough grace." This is a delicate balance.

Relationships at Edmonton Christian School: Responses by Parents and Teachers

Relationships at ECS: Summary and Reflections

Statement #1: Students are provided opportunities to develop God-given gifts and talents, to accept limitations and appreciate gifts and limitations of others.

Without a doubt about three-quarters of the parents (73%) and teachers (79%), displayed in Table 41 and Table 42, indicated that this goal was being met. About 21% of these parents and 24% of these teachers felt the objective was very well met. However, there were about the same number of teachers (18%) and parents (20%) who were unsure of these objectives being accomplished.

The various data collected in this research would complement these results. A number of respondents indicated that more needed to be done to meet the needs of all students. There seemed to be lots of opportunity for the so-called "average" student to develop gifts and be encouraged in their growth. The difficulty was noticing those

Table 41: Parent Responses to Relationships at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 191 (parents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students are provided opportunities to develop God-given gifts and talents, to accept limitations and appreciate gifts and limitations of others.	1% 1 person	2% 3 people	20% 39 people	52% 99 people	21% 40 people
Students actively reflect Christian values in their character/behaviour as they learn to value themselves and respect their neighbour.	0%	10% 20 people	39% 75 people	35% 67 people	9% 18 people
Staff & students share healthy, meaningful relationships characterized by Christ-life attitudes of caring, honest, reconciliation & mutual respect.	0%	2% 4 people	26% 50 people	50% 95 people	17% 32 people
Students feel comfortable & safe in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation & mutual concern; needs are shared, joys celebrated.	1% 1 person	4% 8 people	17% 33 people	48% 92 people	25% 48 people
Students receive discipline for discipleship, nurturing students to live out their Christian faith in words and actions.	0%	7% 13 people	21% 41 people	45% 86 people	19% 37 people

Table 42: Teacher Responses to Relationships at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 33 (teachers)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students are provided opportunities to develop God-given gifts & talents, to accept limitations & appreciate gifts & limitations of others.	0%	0%	18% 6 people	55% 18 people	24% 8 people
Students actively reflect Christian values in their character/behaviour as they learn to value themselves and respect their neighbour.	0%	6% 2 people	61% 20 people	27% 9 people	0%
Staff & students share healthy, meaningful relationships characterized by Christ-life attitudes of caring, honest, reconciliation & mutual respect.	0%	0%	18% 6 people	58% 19 people	15% 5 people
Students feel comfortable & safe in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation & mutual concern; needs are shared, joys celebrated.	0%	3% 1 person	18% 6 people	58% 19 people	12% 4 people
Students receive discipline for discipleship; nurturing students to live out their Christian faith in words and actions.	0%	0%	27% 9 people	52% 17 people	18% 6 people

students that did not fit the norm, whether it be academics, sports or otherwise. It would seem that participants, whose own children struggled to feel good about their own gifts, were most concerned. They wanted their children's gifts to be appreciated and that others recognize the limitations and yet continue to appreciate the individual.

This is an important aspect in Christian education. To view the child as a unique creation of God, to recognize and value each child's strengths and to build on their limitations is a goal to strive for in Christian education. At the same time it is important that others, mostly classmates, accept these limitations and understand how the whole body of Christ is made up of many parts, each having their respective place. All these different parts make up a beautiful mosaic, the people of God.

Statement #2: Students actively reflect Christian values in their character and behaviour as they learn to value themselves and respect their neighbour.

Interestingly, almost half the parents (49%) and two thirds of the teachers (67%) felt this objective was not met, as indicated in Table 41 and 42. On the other hand 44% of the parents and 27% of the teacher respondents felt this objective was met. More teachers than parents suggested this goal as a concern.

The focus of this objective was on the students. It had to do with how students reflected Christian values. This considered how students interacted with each other. It was very relational in nature. It involves the practice of valuing one's self as a child of God and then valuing others as part of God's creation and gifts to the world. It is about learning how to value one's self and then build good relationships with others. Ultimately, it has to do with respecting self and others.

Other qualitative research results in chapter 4 support this quantitative data that suggest this is an area of concern. Many of the short answer responses indicated that some students were disrespectful to each other and their teachers. This took the form of mostly verbal put downs or bullying behaviour. Not as common, but still occurring, were thefts and damage to property. Within the student interviews, all three students indicated relationships mostly among peers, as an area of concern within the Christian school environment.

Obviously, the talk about Christian values and knowing how to live the faith was present. It is not enough just to talk about it; one must also learn how to do it. Many people indicated that the teaching was present, but the living of their faith in positive and healthy relationships, was the challenge. Talking the talk is good; walking the walk needs work.

Statement #3: Staff and students share meaningful, healthy relationships characterized by Christ-life attitudes of caring, honest, reconciliation and mutual respect.

Clearly teachers (73%) and parents (67%) felt very much the same on this issue. Table 41 and 42 portrayed that many felt this objective had been met, to varying degrees. About 15% of the teachers and 17% of the parents felt these relationships were strong. There remained about 26% of the parents and 18% of the teachers who were neutral about this objective being met.

It was interesting to note that the perceived relationship between staff and students was much higher than the relationship between students, as shown in the previously rated question. Thus, it would appear that while students had some difficulty in inter-personal relationships, the teacher-student relationship was much better.

This analysis could be understood as an adult-child relationship being healthier simply because of the student-teacher relationship. Or, this may be so because the teachers, as Christian educators, are more concerned about the dynamics of achieving relationships that model Christ's attitudes and responses to people. This effort may be producing more success, whereas the same degree of commitment and effort may not be there in the student inter-personal relationships.

At the same time, the uncommitted results from about 20% of the respondents need to be noted. Although some of the onus was on the student to work on healthy Christian responses, clearly the greater responsibility rested with the Christian teacher. From the student surveys it was obvious that students sometimes felt that not all teachers showed them the respect they expected from a Christian teacher. Some students indicated feeling put down, belittled, laughed at and frustrated by their teachers. Again, walking the talk, even for Christian teachers, can be a challenge, as the educators model a Christian lifestyle.

Statement #4: Students feel comfortable and safe in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation and mutual concern where needs are shared and joys celebrated.

Interestingly, parents (73%) and teachers (70%) were again fairly consistent in believing that this objective was met, as shown in Table 41 and 42. About 25% of these parents and 12% of the teachers felt this objective was well met. Approximately 21% of the teachers and 22% of the parents were neutral in their assessment or believed that this objective was not being met.

This aspect of safety was one that was mentioned by several parents in other qualitative data collected. They not only expressed a desire for physical safety that they hoped would be most evident in a Christian school, but they desired emotional and social safety as well. As part of a Christian environment one would hope that the participants would feel "safe." This safety is also about comfort, feeling safe taking risks. It is based on trust and believing that you are accepted for who you are.

The number of parents and teachers who remained neutral (about 20%) in their evaluation of students being provided opportunities to develop gifts, to accept limitations and appreciate others, was quite comparable to the number who remained neutral (about 20%) in their evaluation of students feeling confident and safe in their environment. Also, the number of parents and teachers (about 20%) who remained unconvinced that staff and students achieved healthy Christian relationship was comparable. I wonder if some parents and teachers were identifying the element of "safety" to be acceptance of the individual. Some students did not feel that their unique talents were honoured and respected, if in fact, they even felt these had been identified. Within this ECS environment these students were probably struggling to feel accepted.

Fortunately, about three-quarters of the respondents felt this objective was clearly being met; that indicates that most students felt safe at ECS. They worked in an atmosphere where they felt they could take risks. They generally trusted their peers and teachers and felt relatively comfortable with recognizing their gifts, while working on their limitations.

Statement #5: Students receive discipline for the purpose of discipleship, nurturing students to live out their Christian faith in words and actions.

Again the teacher (70%) and parent (64%) respondents, as portrayed in Table 41 and 42, were extremely close in their ratings. About 19% of these parents and 18% of these teachers felt this objective was very well achieved. Although over two-thirds of the parents and teachers felt the objective was met, there remained about one-third who were neutral in their evaluation.

This objective was generally an assessment of the teachers' response to inappropriate behaviour. However, discipline is not only about punishment. It is about positive nurturing of a student toward proper Christian action. Within the Christian school it is an essential aspect of Christian learning to nurture the child toward a Christian response to God, self and others. It is learning how to walk the talk; it is so often said that actions speak louder than words. Talking about your beliefs and even integrating this learning into your understanding of the world is easier than doing it. This is the challenge for the Christian school, to put faith into concrete Christian responses to problem-solving situations and into relationship building.

Many of the parents, teachers and students commented on the Christian community at ECS. For the majority of the community members, this was a strong and healthy relationship. Parents spoke of being welcomed and accepted within the school. Teachers talked about supportive colleagues and a community that shared common beliefs. Student surveys and interviews revealed that community life was vitally important to the students. They enjoyed their friends and liked their teachers. Most of them felt comfortable, secure and were very happy with their community at ECS. However, this ability and this responsibility to nurture everyone toward a healthy Christian response to God, self and others remains an ongoing challenge for Christian educators.

Academics at Edmonton Christian School: Responses by Parents and Teachers

Academics at ECS: Summary and Reflections

Statement #1: Students are nurtured and equipped to influence society and live out Christian principles of justice, love, reconciliation and peace.

More parents (70%) felt that this objective was being met than did teachers (60%), as shown in Table 43 and Table 44. About 18% of parents and 12% of teachers felt this objective was very well met. On the other hand, 21% of parents and 27% of teachers were neutral in their analysis. A few parents did not feel this objective was met.

My reading of this objective is that it focuses on nurturing and equipping students to live the Christian worldview in their daily lives. This means being just, loving and resolving conflicts, so that harmony is achieved in a peaceful community. It is likely that teachers have a more direct, daily interaction with students and see the living of these principles in concrete examples. They know the daily failures and the brokenness of community. Thus, they might evaluate this as not being as successful. Again, I believe this is a "walking the talk" issue.

Many people reported that they saw the Christian lifestyle as actually happening within the school. This was consistent with data already presented. Although far from perfect, parents, students and staff believe that ECS students are learning to live as Christians in community. Results indicated that the Christian perspective was taught and modeled in and out of classrooms; learning was occurring and practice was evident.

Statement #2: Student evaluation is primarily for the purpose of fostering student growth, enabling students to reach their God-given potential.

Within the quantitative data evidenced in Table 43 and 44, clearly parents (75%) perceived this objective as being much more successful than did teachers (57%). About 25% of parents and 18% of teachers felt this objective was very well met. On the other hand, 18% of parents and 21% of teachers were neutral in their evaluation, with 12% of the teachers being sure this objective was not met.

Throughout the qualitative data collected, many parents expressed the belief that academics were very well achieved at ECS. At the same time, some parents recognized the emphasis on academic achievement but questioned the importance that a Christian perspective would place on academics. Some parents felt that there was an over-emphasis on academics, to the exclusion of other God-given potential in students.

I expect the key words in this objective are those that focus on evaluation "for the purpose of… enabling students to reach their God-given potential." There may be no

Table 43: Parent Responses to Academics at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 191 (parents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students are nurtured/equipped to influence society & live out Christian principles of justice, love, reconciliation & peace.	0%	2% 4 people	21% 40 people	52% 100 people	18% 34 people
Student evaluation is primarily for the purpose of fostering student growth, enabling students to reach their God-given potential.	1% 1 person	2% 3 people	18% 35 people	50% 95 people	25% 47 people
Teachers actively engage students in real (genuine) learning environments, articulating God's action & our responsibility in the world.	0%	1% 2 people	17% 32 people	49% 94 people	25% 47 people
Educational standards prepare students for work & learning that they will encounter in life.	1% 1 person	4% 8 people	16% 31 people	43% 83 people	35% 53 people
Student/teacher interactions, in halls & classrooms, show that this is a learning community that lives & works toward responsible discipleship.	1% 1 person	1% 2 people	12% 22 people	48% 91 people	31% 59 people

Table 44: Teacher Responses to Academics at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 33 (teachers)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students are nurtured/equipped to influence society and live out Christian principles of justice, love, reconciliation and peace.	0%	0%	27% 9 people	48% 16 people	12% 4 people
Student evaluation is primarily for the purpose of fostering student growth, enabling students to reach their God-given potential.	0%	12% 4 people	21% 7 people	39% 13 people	18% 6 people
Teachers actively engage students in real (genuine) learning environments, articulating God's action & our responsibility in the world.	0%	3% 1 person	6% 2 people	64% 22 people	21% 7 people
Educational standards prepare students for work & learning that they will encounter in life.	0%	3% 1 person	12% 4 people	52% 17 people	27% 9 people
Student/teacher interactions, in halls and classrooms, show that this is a learning community that lives and works toward responsible discipleship.	0%	0%	9% 3 people	55% 18 people	30% 10 people

question, even in the minds of the teachers, but that ECS has achieved a high standard of learning in the area of academics. But, at what cost has a strong academic program been achieved? What about those non-academic students?

Within the restructuring of ECS and the amalgamation with EPS, as an alternative school, there have been teacher concerns. For example, teachers recognized the increased focus on student achievement; more formal testing was mandated. The emphasis clearly was on student achievement. Although this may not be inconsistent with a Christian view of education, the resulting decrease of emphasis on recognizing other God-given potential, besides academic growth, needs to be considered.

As a long-time member of this community, I have seen the somewhat subtle focus on academics. This increased focus may be taking attention away from the vision of meeting the needs of the whole child. Teachers are directly involved in this ongoing drama. There is a balancing act; teachers try to maintain a high quality education which is Christian in its desire to reach one's greatest potential and use God-given gifts to their fullest. They also embrace the Christian mandate and vision to develop the whole child, to recognize that there are other gifts and more potential in each child, besides just academics. The Christian teacher desires to focus on the whole child and questions the balance of this focus. This fact might account for teachers' responses and their concerns regarding whether this objective enables students to reach their God-given potential as a whole person.

Statement #3: Teachers actively engage students in real (genuine) learning environments, articulating God's action and our responsibility in the world.

Table 43 and 44 portray, overwhelmingly, that teachers (85%) perceived that they were actively engaging students in learning, in ways that foster the Christian vision for education. Parents (74%) were not quite as confident in the achievement of this goal. About 25% of the parents and 21% of the teachers felt this objective was very well met. Approximately 17% of the parents and 6% of the teachers were undecided in their assessment; a few teachers and parents felt sure that this objective was not met.

This objective emphasizes the learning environment as one in which the Christian teacher clearly presents the Christian perspective in education. A Christian education and the living out of the Christian faith are not just about giving the knowledge required but it is about extending this learning into an understanding of and a development toward a Christian response in the world. To integrate the Christian perspective into the curriculum is one of the main objectives of Christian education; this is fundamental to our vision and mission. Within the learning environment, Christian teachers attempt to teach and lead students to see how God's presence and action are in the created world. And, from this recognition of God, as Lord of all, it is then the teacher's responsibility to model and teach students how to live accordingly, as God's people in the world.

Hopefully parents see the fruits of this labour, but without a doubt it would be the teachers and students who live and work within the school environment each day that truly see genuine results. The discrepancy between teacher and parent responses was not great. It is understandable; teachers might respond differently to this objective than parents. Teachers see and know their own actions and since the statement is about teachers, they identified what they perceive they are doing.

Statement #4: Educational standards prepare students for work and learning that they will encounter later in life.

Both the teacher (79%) and parent (78%) populations were similar in their perceptions that this objective was being met, as indicated in Table 43 and 44. About 35% of the parents and 27% of the teachers believed this objective was very well met. Clearly, most respondents felt ECS had educational standards that prepared students for their work in life and/or further learning that they may need. Only 16% of parents were neutral in their evaluation while 5% did not feel this objective was being met; 12% of the parents were neutral in their evaluation and a few teachers did not think this objective was being met.

These results are consistent with the qualitative data that suggested that most parents and teachers at ECS believed academic standards were high. Government achievement tests indicated that ECS did well on meeting the learning objectives established by the province of Alberta.

The discussion regarding academic education versus non-academic education continues. Some parents propose that educational standards are much more encompassing than academic learning. These parents feel ECS places too much emphasis on academics. In earlier discussions about 20% of parent respondents indicated that God-given gifts of some children were not as clearly met. Children, with seemingly greater limitations, need to realize their own unique potential so that they too feel they have value and worth to society. Of course, these attitudes will influence their work and learning to come. The respondents might argue that other educational standards – such as physical, social or emotional development – take a second place to academics. Thus, students might be somewhat unprepared, according to some respondents, to meet other areas of learning in life. However, the majority of teachers and parents believed ECS adequately "educates" students for work and further learning.

Statement #5: Student/teacher interactions, in halls and classrooms, show that this is a learning community that lives and works toward responsible discipleship.

Revealed in Table 43 and 44, teachers (85%) and parents (79%) were, again, very close in their assessment of this objective. Of this number, 30% of the teachers believed this objective to be very well met and 9% were neutral. About 31% of these parents felt this objective was very well met while 12% were neutral in their stand on this statement.

In this statement the relationship between teacher and student was emphasized; it advocated that teachers and students were learning, living, and working together in ways that were Christ-like. This quantitative data is consistent with other information collected from parents, teachers, and students regarding teacher-student relationships. In all three categories most of the participants perceived relationships between teachers and students to be positive, healthy and reflective of a Christian community working together and supporting each other.

Many students indicated that they often turn to their teachers for support and help, besides academic help. One student told of the time when a teacher helped her. She was feeling really "sad and down" about a particularly unhappy situation. Then, a teacher went and talked with her. The student said,

> This teacher made me feel better. [This teacher] really cared and helped me out through that time. [This teacher] was the reason I made it through this year… [This teacher] made a difference… just one example of how our teachers could and do help… Now, that's what I call Christian.

Many parents indicated how much their children enjoy, love or appreciate their teachers at ECS.

Teachers at Edmonton Christian School: Responses by Parents and Teachers

Teachers at ECS: Summary and Reflections

Statement #1: Teachers are active, committed Christians who model a life of faith in the school and in all areas of their life.

The parents (77%) and teachers (85%), as is suggested in Table 45 and 46, were close in agreement with their evaluation of this objective. Approximately 29% of parents and 30% of teachers felt this objective was very well met. However, some parents were not sure. About 10% of the parents and 9% of the teachers were neutral in their assessment; 7% of the parents indicated that this objective was not being met.

Several comments on the qualitative study indicated parents were not sure how all teachers live "in all areas of their life." Some parents felt uncomfortable making these judgments. However, the results were consistent with other data collected. Most parents and students felt that teachers model Christ. When there was a failure to do so, some attributed this to the fact that teachers are human too and they "all make mistakes." To be a Christian teacher is to have very high demands. Many felt the expectation to model Christ at all times is, indeed, an impossible task.

Nevertheless, Christian teachers strive to model a life committed to God. Some students talked about their teachers as coaches for various school teams. They commended the teachers for working hard and taking their jobs seriously while still being Christian in their attitude and actions. One student discovered that when they played basketball, as a Christian, the goal was "to praise God while we play." This student claimed, "My coach actually said that." She was quite impressed with her coach and thought that behaviour and attitude was really a model of Christ. Another student talked about a particular volleyball game when the opposing team coach was rude to his coach. The student recalled, "Our coach simply told the other coach that he didn't appreciate the unwelcome atmosphere. [The coach] stayed calm and behaved very Christ-like. [The teacher's] Christian values were really shown." Another student summed up the

Table 45: Parent Responses to Teachers at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 191 (parents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers are active, committed Christians who model a life of faith in the school & in all areas of life.	1% 1 person	6% 12 people	10% 19 people	48% 91 people	29% 56 people
Teachers are active learners who seek to understand & discern the world around them while using their gifts to enhance learning for students.	1% 1 person	0%	14% 27 people	51% 98 people	33% 53 people
Teachers demonstrate competency within their subject area with the ability to integrate the Christian perspective in teaching.	0%	1% 1 person	14% 27 people	47% 90 people	32% 61 people
Teachers provide a variety of learning activities so students may respond to learning in different ways according to their individual needs or gifts.	1% 2 people	3% 6 people	17% 32 people	44% 84 people	29% 55 people
Teachers are friendly, caring people who are easy to approach with questions, concerns or comments.	0%	4% 7 people	6% 11 people	38% 72 people	46% 88 people

Table 46: Teacher Responses to Teachers at ECS

Statements Results in % and # of people N = 33 (teachers)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers are active, committed Christians who model a life of faith in the school and in all areas of life.	0%	0%	9% 3 people	55% 18 people	30% 10 people
Teachers are active learners who seek to understand and discern the world around them while using their gifts to enhance learning for students.	0%	3% 1 person	9% 3 people	58% 19 people	27% 9 people
Teachers demonstrate competency within their subject area with the ability to integrate the Christian perspective in teaching.	0%	0%	15% 5 people	58% 19 people	24% 8 people
Teachers provide a variety of learning activities so students may respond to learning in different ways according to their individual needs or gifts.	0%	0%	12% 4 people	58% 19 people	27% 9 people
Teachers are friendly, caring people who are easy to approach with questions, concerns or comments.	0%	0%	6% 2 people	45% 15 people	45% 15 people

sentiment of many others by saying that "through the teachers' actions we learn about God. It makes me want to be more Christ-like, too."

Statement #2: Teachers are active learners who seek to understand and discern the world around them while using their gifts to enhance learning for students.

Both teachers (85%) and parents (84%) agreed that most teachers met this objective. About 33% of parents and 27% of teachers believed this objective was very well met. At the same time, about 14% of parents and 9% of teachers were neutral in their assessment, according to Table 45 and 46. This statement was often difficult for both teachers and parent respondents to answer because all teachers are unique; they are not all alike. Whereas this statement may be true for some teachers, it may not be fully true of all teachers. Just as all Christians are on different stages in their faith journey, so are teachers.

Also, the way in which teachers use their gifts, and even the gifts themselves, differ. Some parents and teachers appreciated certain gifts in people more than they recognized other gifts in other teachers. Even the recognition of a gift may challenge some people. Some parents and students really enjoyed and spoke highly of a certain teacher while others were not so enthusiastic, even about the same teacher. This gave evidence that teachers are different and relate differently, more effectively, with some students, rather than others.

A Christian community is a place where members must strive to recognize each other's gifts, even, or especially, when these gifts differ from your own. This is not always easy. At the same time, teachers must use their gifts to enhance learning for students, while recognizing and acknowledging their limitations. This may require finding creative ways to compensate for those skills that they lack.

Statement #3: Teachers demonstrate competency within their subject area with the ability to integrate the Christian perspective in teaching environments.

Revealed in Table 45 and 46, teachers (82%) and parents (79%) mostly agreed that this objective was well met at ECS. About 32% of parents and 24% of teachers thought this objective was very well met. Approximately 14% of parents and 15% of teachers were neutral in their assessment. Teachers were considered qualified professionals, generally proficient at their jobs and able to teach from a Christian perspective. This integration of faith into learning was a vision established and promoted for Christian education at ECS.

According to other data collected from parents, teachers and students, the teaching staffs at ECS were seen as contributing to effective Christian education. Teachers were viewed as qualified, competent educators and as Christ-like models for students. The academic standards were considered quite high.

Throughout the interviews and other student surveys it was clear that parents and students believed the Christian perspective was well integrated into the curriculum. Christian teachers felt passionately about their Christian worldview and passed this on to their students. Christian teaching and Christian modeling was considered a strong factor contributing to Christian education at ECS.

Statement #4: Teachers provide a variety of learning activities so students may respond to learning in different ways according to their individual needs or gifts.

Most teachers (85%) were confident in the ability of staff to meet this objective, and about three-quarters of the parents (73%) felt the same way, as revealed in Table 45 and 46. On the other hand, about 17% of the parents and 12 % of the teachers were neutral in their evaluation.

This statement required teachers to vary learning activities, provide a variety of learning styles and recognize the diversity of gifts and needs within the students they teach. The responsibility was on teachers, as educators, to provide the environment best suited for each child's learning.

According to results already gathered from the qualitative data, teachers were considered competent professionals who provided a Christian education. The needs of most students appeared to be met and most parents were satisfied with the learning environment. However, about 20% of parents believed even more could be done to meet the needs of all students. They seemed to suggest that not all unique or special students had their needs met. Again, teachers perceived that this objective was better met than did some parents.

Statement #5: Teachers are friendly, caring people who are easy to approach with questions, concerns or comments.

Without a doubt, Table 45 and 46 indicate that teachers at ECS were rated by parents (84%) and teachers (90%) as friendly, caring people. Community members perceived teachers as easy-to-approach with questions, comments, and concerns. This was the most highly rated statement on the whole rating scale.

Since teachers are the connection between learning and the integration of the Christian perspective in student learning, it is important that parents and teachers be able to have open communication. A high percentage of parents believed this was the case; this was a strong support for Christian teachers at ECS. Students, also, placed a high value on their teachers. Their role as Christian educators and models of Christ was clearly validated, many times over, in these results.

As a source of qualitative data, this rating scale survey, collected from parents and teachers, provided interesting information to the overall study. Each question from the rating scale survey has been interpreted and results categorized. These conclusions support previously collected data and give evidence to repetitive results, similar comments appear. Consistent with results from the questionnaire, global themes indicate that ECS is a Christian school because of the integrated curriculum, the Christian teachers and community relationships. These important factors, emphasized in both the questionnaire and rating scale survey, appear to be primary features in determining what makes ECS a Christian school.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH THEMES, INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERVIEWS

In this chapter I present data collected in the interview process. These qualitative gleanings add to the quantitative and qualitative findings already presented in chapter 4 and chapter 5. From the interviews, an in-depth look enhances the responses and patterns already obvious from previously collected data. At the conclusion of each interview, I reflect on the discussion while interpreting, explaining and possibly raising even more questions. In chapter 7 there is a more comprehensive examination of the global themes and patterns.

Overview of the Interview Process

Upon completion of the questionnaire and rating scale surveys I desired to probe more deeply into some of the issues that kept re-occurring in the surveys, both as qualitative and quantitative data. As researcher, I then attempted to interpret these rich descriptions in the light of my own experience within the community of Edmonton Christian School (ECS). Thus, this chapter takes an in-depth look at the stories, experiences and opinions of various people connected to ECS. Personal stories give expression to various themes that emerged from the data already collected.

In collecting more qualitative data, I chose nine people to be interviewed: three parents, three teachers and three students. These taped interviews were conducted in small resource rooms in both the Northeast and West campuses. Specific questions were prepared for each interviewee. Several questions were general to all interview sessions and the rest were specifically related to the individual's responses on their completed surveys. At any time throughout the interview, the respondents were free to deviate from the questions; sometimes they did and excellent discussions ensued.

Numerous parents, teachers and students signed their names on the surveys indicating that they would be willing to be interviewed to discuss this topic further. Some respondents, willing to participate, were more closely connected to me than others. I knew them well, having interacted over the years with many of them because I have taught their children and worked alongside them on committees. Also, there were willing and very outspoken respondents whose views I have heard numerous times and who are well known in the school community. I wanted to hear new voices. I wanted to interview those with whom I did not have a long-standing, close relationship. There were several additional parent, teacher and student candidates whom I seriously considered, but finally, I simply chose nine.

I chose representatives from all three campuses, mostly people who had committed their time and had experiences related to ECS. My criteria considered a variation of the following:

(1) people who completed their survey in such a way that indicated thoughtfulness about the topic and who were somewhat typical of the other surveys analysed;
(2) people whose responses alerted "red flags" in my mind about some topic or issue that might require further exploration;
(3) people whose responses raised questions or presented thoughts and ideas that I wished to explore;
(4) a sampling from all three ECS campuses;
(5) people with a history at ECS -- those having a greater understanding of the school and its history and progression through the years;
(6) a male/female mix, if possible;
(7) individuals, if I personally knew them, that might contribute greater depth to my survey but whose views I was not overly familiar;
(8) individuals whose point of view might not be typical to the others and yet it was well worth exploring; and,
(9) interviewees from the teacher population that had teaching experience that spanned all divisions.

In writing about these interviews, I have used quotes to highlight specific word choices that the interviewees have used. However, even when quotation marks are not used, I have tried to adopt the speaking style of the person being interviewed as a way of representing the person's insights as validly as possible.

Parent Interviews

Jasmine

Jasmine attended an inter-denominational school for most of her primary years. As part of a mobile family, she made several trips around the world and was educated in various communities and different cultures. Without a doubt Jasmine had been exposed to a Christian worldview since a young age. However, this Christian worldview appeared to be different than the worldview experienced by most members of ECS.

I chose to interview Jasmine because she had distinctly different children. One child had experienced many learning difficulties, had required a modified program and often a teacher aide to work closely with him on an individual program. Jasmine described this child as quieter; one who takes "a softer, more gentle approach to life." Another child was just about the opposite. She always had a very high energy level accompanied by advanced intelligence and strong leadership skills, although she didn't like to use these skills. Harnessing this energy and shaping her behaviour had always presented a challenge to teachers, stretching their ability to shape and mould her energy in constructive ways.

Jasmine had volunteered many hours and been greatly involved on numerous committees in the school. She had been part of the ECS interview process for new families and prospective students. She brought to these interviews her experience as a Christian growing up in another worldview, different from the one usually associated with the members of ECS. She had a broader view of what it meant to be a Christian and sometimes her present situation caused her to feel limited and somewhat stifled, or, as she said, "a fish out of water" in the ECS community. She struggled with wondering if ECS had been the best place for herself and her family, but settled with the statement, "I believe ECS is a Christian place."

Although a strong supporter of the school, Jasmine and her family struggled with issues surrounding Christian education at ECS. Some of Jasmine's responses were representative of those made by other parents. I thought that her diversity of involvement in ECS and her experience with her own children would quickly give a broader perspective on Christian life at ECS.

Interview Responses

In describing Christian education, Jasmine said,

> Christian education offers us, as a family, an opportunity to have our children in a setting, for a large part of the day, that would be very similar in teaching and structure and beliefs to what they would experience at home… For our children the large part of their day is the school, so school becomes extremely important.

Jasmine married a man who "was not very involved in the [Christian Reformed Church] CRC church, as most CRC kids are not involved in their church." Jasmine questioned whether she made the right choice to go to a Christian Reformed Church. She claimed that she felt okay about her decision -- most days. She wondered about one child though, academically and spiritually. She suggested, "there have been wonderful teachers that challenged [her], but I don't believe we foster excellence." She thinks it is a "culture thing," not an ethnic culture but a mentality of the people in this society. This mentality has it's own culture just like "our school has a culture." Jasmine wondered if possibly the early founders and immigrants, "had to deal with nationality and maybe strived so hard so that the kids now don't have to." The students today seem to have the attitude: "If I do enough to get by, that is good enough for now."

Jasmine talked about the Christian Reformed community. She expressed that it

> …is a very closed community; you go to school, church and work with the same people. You go to the same parties and see the same people. It is an artificial environment. Sometimes it makes me angry. I push my kids out there and say, 'the world needs you as a Christian. It needs you to be the best person that you can be or, if you do not, you will not be contributing the way you were meant to be.'

When discussing the features that make ECS a Christian school, Jasmine named two things: teachers and a certain comfort level. The teachers provide the opportunity to pray and worship together. She recalled,

> a particular teacher praying for us when we had received some disheartening news concerning certain tests that came back on one of our children. This was symbolic of what Christian community should be about. The teachers teaching our children skills they need in the world and teaching them how God holds them up in all their difficulties as well as their triumphs.

Another important aspect was the sense of comfort, a comfort level about the family that my child was going to visit. There was an assumption that they have similar values and common goals if their children go to ECS. You are not as afraid of who might be the friends your children hang around with in and out of school.

In her survey, Jasmine commented on things that hinder ECS from being a more effective Christian school. She said, "Our standards or expectations are not high enough. I have witnessed behaviour in our school on several occasions which I wouldn't tolerate in my home and which I know is not tolerated at the public school in my neighbourhood." She expanded on this by telling of her conversation with one of her children who tells her things that have been done and said, the kinds of antics that the teens get up to. Jasmine believed, "Somebody should be putting a stop to that. It is not appropriate." And yet, they seem to be allowed to go too far. She wondered if "maybe it is kind of in the spirit of acceptance? Or, maybe it's just misguided behaviour? The classroom behaviour in Junior High was sometimes not right." Jasmine claimed that her child

> knows what is right and wrong but was still miserable to one of [the] teachers. If someone doesn't make [her] behave as a Christian should and force it, then [she] will continue to do these inappropriate behaviours. [She] is not changed by it and it makes [her] no different, as a Christian should be.

Much of the behaviour involved disrespectful treatment of one another. The dignity and respect for classmates and teachers was at stake, "And, then they don't even respect their own self." They should be saying, "I need to do this better because I've been made, especially, to do it well." One of her children in particular had leadership abilities that needed to be fostered.

Jasmine talked about her other child as much different. This child often found school difficult because of the lack of respect directed toward him from other people. Jasmine stated, "because of some of [his] learning struggles, [he] has been the object of some torment." Some days she said the child handled it well and other days [he] was totally crushed. Jasmine said, "Teachers are probably not always aware of it. [This] class tended to not be an accepting bunch; can that be a class personality thing?"

In discussing the characteristics of a Christian teacher, Jasmine stated that a Christian teacher should have "the same qualities I hope exist in Christian parents." They need to see and treasure the uniqueness of each child regardless of how different they are from one another. This is fundamental to Christianity. This is how Christ accepts us so we need to do the same as adults in relation to the children. She spoke about teachers having "to shape those children. They cannot take a hands-off approach."

The discussions about relating faith to school and Christian integration in the curriculum are amusing to Jasmine. She wondered, "How can you not? If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I integrate my faith. It comes naturally. When you start talking about how you are going to do it, the separation already exists."

Some of Jasmine's most memorable experiences at ECS were teachers praying with us as parents, one-on-one. Another memorable occasion was when a teacher said how he "recognized our [child] as a bundle of energy with so much potential. The teacher said how he liked, in his job, the challenge of those kinds of children. It was so nice to hear."

Jasmine talked about the role ECS plays in the faith development of her children. She believed that sometimes a Christian education might be a detriment to faith development because the children are so comfortable with this God-talk that there is no challenge issued for them to choose their own faith. Jasmine stated that one of her children's faith-life appears so similar to the typical CRC faith expression; this is evident in that you just "grow into it." Her other child "thinks hard; maybe school influenced that."

For example, in the sport's program it is demanded that her child behave in a Christian way or you don't play. Her child has witnessed, while playing against other teams, that they pinch and verbally abuse each other. Also, sometimes, these other coaches swear at the players. Her child noticed that being a Christian made a difference. But, this does not bring [her] closer to a personal decision for Christ. Jasmine wondered, "if attendance at ECS has allowed my children to feel a false sense of security. They know the theology. They know a Christian community but they haven't been forced to face the question, about their own commitment to God."

For a short time, Jasmine considered why the Christian school might not have forced this question, this commitment to Christ. Is it because ECS is an academic place? When Jasmine was on the interviewing committee for new parents many CRC families were interviewed. In these interviews, it was assumed that if new parents attended a Christian Reformed Church they almost, already, had the stamp of approval. However, some could not express their faith. Others, who did not attend the CRC, wanted their children in this kind of setting because of the loving and caring environment. But, Jasmine suggested ECS personnel were somehow uneasy about bringing in these parents because they couldn't express their faith with a Christian perspective on education.

Toward future improvements at ECS, where the school can become an even better Christian school, Jasmine advocated:

> We need to work with other denominations and build a strong Christian system with an evangelistic focus as well as academic. It grieves me that we have so many different (Christian) schools. We need to proclaim to the world, together, that we have something to offer; school should be an evangelistic tool.

Jasmine also elaborated on changes that she believes are necessary. Some of these changes are fundamental changes requiring a great deal of effort and conscious deliberation by the whole community:

> We need to change mindsets. We have an internal mindset that really doesn't want to become more inclusive of others. We have a 'closed community' mindset. It is our expectation that children will go to school here, stay in the community and go to our churches tied with this community. They will grow up and they will send their children to this school and the cycle will begin again. It is a cyclical thing. For example, a service project permission slip from the Senior High recently asked if parents would give permission to smoke while on this service project. This exemplifies what I am talking about. Edmonton Public School already has a policy of 'no smoking' so, what are we doing? The explanation seems to be that these same kids smoke anyways. We don't want them sneaking off to smoke and therefore we get parental permission… This is a weak argument. This smoking behaviour, accepted in our community, is still illegal, absolutely not allowed. These activities should not be happening in or on our school property, anyways. These factors, simple things when they stand alone, if changed, would bring several other denominations in to our school. These are lifestyle issues.

Personally, Jasmine recognized that her experiences have broadened her worldview and that she views things in a different light. She felt that she

> came in to this community with my world having been much bigger, having been around the world several times as a child, been in different cultures and in different church settings. I have seen how many Christians worship in different ways. We should not be exclusionary. ECS community is narrow. We need to broaden it… We need to go from our narrow, safe, comfortable and known environment, to a greater exposure to other Christians.

Ultimately, Jasmine strongly supported ECS as a Christian place. Although she can see room for improvements, she truly believed:

> ECS is a Christian place and like Christians we have ways we can grow and improve. If at the school we are open to God using us and changing us, we will grow in the same way we do internally. But, that again comes back to our mindset. Do we see ourselves as having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ or do we see ourselves as part of a corporate religious body? They are very different. The worldview of ECS is intellectually very broad but spiritually weak.

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

Jasmine's background was somewhat similar in worldview to mine, in the past. As the interview progressed I could see that we shared many views and concerns. Some concerns about ECS were clearly articulated by Jasmine. I did not realize her personal struggles and questions about educating her children in ECS. Understandably, Jasmine's children are important to her and she worries about their future and their relationship with God. This is an emotional topic for her. She experienced moments of anger and frustration and then love and appreciation. Still she wondered if she had done the right thing by having her children in this school. "Only time will tell," she indicated.

With her own personal issues on lifestyle being much more conservative and evangelical, she struggled with issues in ECS. Nevertheless, she recognized the good things about the school and articulated this clearly. Without a doubt she expressed a passion for Christian education. At the same time, Jasmine acknowledged the inconsistencies and limitations. She identified her world today as being much like a fish bowl experience with narrower views, less tolerance and exposure to the real world. Her views and experiences of the past belonged to a much greater ocean of broader views; she had developed more tolerance because of her increased exposure to the real world.

It was a very interesting experience for me to realize just how very different are her children. It became quite clear that her concerns were greater for one child than the other, and this concern was not based on academic achievement or lack of it. Is it possible that ECS is right for some children, but maybe not the best place for others? Not knowing how to handle strong, active, high-energy children may be a downfall. But, so is the inability to meet the needs of the academically challenged. Are these weaknesses not also inherent in other schools as well? Maybe weaknesses or ineffectiveness is more accepted in other places of education. The demand for perfection is high in the Christian school. Could it be that the expectations are too high? Or, is it true that there needs to be more of an effort to walk the talk. Members of the ECS community say this community can educate all children, according to their individual need. Is this an unreasonable assumption or claim? Are resources and funding available to help each student reach their potential. Just because the same funding is available as in the public school, is the Christian community not expected to do even better? Or, maybe, for Jasmine the feelings of frustration were due to worldview differences, closed relationships and an inability to communicate to others the need for change.

There was a tone of sadness, when I listened to Jasmine. She did not know if her children will be Christian and that was a concern. Having done what she believed to be her best, was it good enough? This question haunts all parents who believe strongly in God as the Lord of all Life. When their children do not seem to have the same conviction, it is troubling. How can Christian educators and parents be expected to do anything more than what is perceived as their best? Must they not, at a certain point, fall back on their belief, their Confidence, that God will care for these children as God cares for all people? Parents and teachers cannot make them believe or be Christian. These children are sent to a Christian school simply to help their belief. As expressed by other parents, maybe these students will learn something in the Christian school about life and God. Maybe some day they will be forced to pause, to think and to fold their hands and pray for themselves, believing with a faith that is their own. Then, their Christian parents will know that the Christian school, along with the supporting community, has fulfilled its mandate to educate toward a Christian lifestyle in attitudes, beliefs and relationships. As a teacher who must listen carefully to the needs of parents of the children I teach, Jasmine represents, in my mind, many parents whose children are educated in a Christian school but whose children do not seem, externally, for the moment, to have appropriated this faith. Time will tell; even that is in the hands of God.

Sonata

Sonata grew up in a family that was very conservative, adhering to the reformed worldview typical of the supporting community at ECS. Sonata went to a Christian school. She had a Christian education all her life and attended the Edmonton Christian High School. She and her family attended the Christian Reformed Church, as they have always done. Her family has been a stable and contributing force to ECS. Sonata, as parent to children attending ECS, often volunteered at the school and is involved in the life of the school.

I have known Sonata for two years. We served on a committee together and often passed in the halls and talked briefly. I chose to interview Sonata because her survey was complete and contained many ideas, issues and concerns. Sonata and her husband filled the survey out together, so I knew there had been discussion and intentional reflection on the questions. At the same time, because of my interactions with Sonata over the past little while, I knew she was willing to communicate her views honestly. I chose her because I wanted to interview an involved, reflective parent whose views on the survey seemed typical for many parent responses.

Interview Responses

When asked about why she and her husband chose Christian education, Sonata said that she and her husband

> chose to send our kids to a Christian school because it's important that our children understand and are educated to understand that God is a part of everything we do, in all areas of our lives; it is not just church on Sunday… We want our children to discover God in all aspects of their lives and in all things they learn, such as science, math and language arts. We want a Christian attitude reflected in the school, in the teachers and in the education that our children receive.

Because Sonata has been involved with Christian education all her life as a student and now as a parent, I asked her what are the best things about Christian education at ECS. She talked about the community, the teachers and the education received. She said that the teachers "work hard to include parents in the Christian education process." The teachers work hard to build this relationship; it is not an "us and them" philosophy; "ECS is a community, not just a place I send my kids to get educated." Also, "teachers try to model behaviour and Christian attitude and Christian expectations." She claimed that the kids see that. The people at this school "provide a sound academic education." She was adamant that she would not send her kids to a school where academic standards were lacking. She believed the standards at ECS are high and that this was good thing.

When discussing discipline at ECS Sonata said there seemed to be an "unwillingness or inability to deal with situations where community breaks down." This was elaborated on to include discipline issues, issues based on perceived CRC social groups or pockets of cliques and students who are bullies, engaging in bully behaviour.

Bullying and interpersonal relationships became the focus of much of her talk. She claimed that some kids decide that they are "king of the castle" and these students go about making this clear. This is usually handled well by teachers. Sometimes, however, she felt that reports have been made to teachers and they have said, "Oh well, that happens" and the issues were not addressed, as far as she knew. She expressed the sadness that, "We can't always fix it for our kids. Behaviour that is not reflective of our Christian values needs to be dealt with; maybe it needs to become a classroom issue and have a class discussion."

For example, Sonata believes there is a lot of teasing and some students say, "Oh I was just joking." She suggested that, for a student who is quite sensitive and is the brunt of constant teasing, this becomes a big deal for them. Sonata could understand that the child may reach the point where they have finally had it and will not take any more; she admitted that something drastic could happen then. Sonata hoped that in a Christian school this teasing behaviour would not be accepted. However, once her child came home crying and said, "Why don't they respect me?" This child understood it as a lack of respect. Sonata advocated that the school community needs to work on respect; teachers and parents need to deal with this.

Sonata suggested that cliques happen, possibly because of fear or comfort levels. Some parents may find it hard to step out and include others, but the community needs to welcome newcomers. She spoke of a time when her youngest child started Kindergarten. A group of parents who knew each other well and attended the same church had already decided, among themselves, who was going to do what job in the LAC (Local Advisory Committee). Sonata didn't care but wondered about new parents to the school that weren't yet part of that group. She wondered how they felt; probably they would ask the question, "How do I fit in here?"

According to Sonata, a Christian teacher must have a personal faith. Christian teachers cannot reflect a Christian faith if they don't have a personal relationship with God. They also need a passion for teaching. With those two things, a personal faith and a passion for teaching, the Christian teacher becomes the role model for what it means to be a Christian. The students need good Christian role models.

In discussing the school's involvement in the faith development of her children, Sonata suggested, "Children express personal faith in very different ways and everybody is individual, making it more complicated." She suggested that her kids talk about praying for someone or something in class. This reflected a personal growth and involvement. They talked about the struggles they've had and this lead them to think about what is appropriate behaviour and what is not. In journals and writings they were "encouraged to go beyond the Bible stories and to think, 'how is this relevant to us'." Sonata saw faith as a growing process, from Bible stories to journaling to an expression of a personal faith. It is harder to identify at an earlier age. Even as adults, expressing faith at home is important. She indicated that children need to see their parents express their own faith; it is not only the school that needs to teach this. At this point, Sonata went even further in her explanations to suggest that parents also need to learn how to express their faith and how to show their children. Parents need to foster the development and expression of a personal faith and to see whether their kids were learning to do it also, or not. Sonata felt that this task should be undertaken between the home and school – a shared responsibility.

In considering improvements in Christian education at ECS, Sonata talked about political issues. She stated,

> Now that we are a part of Edmonton public school we have seen a great growth in numbers of students attending our school. I need to continue to believe that decisions are made based on what is best for my children and the community rather than money being our bottom line. Sometimes we have to make decisions and go in faith. Parents need to support that and put their money where their mouth is.

She continued to suggest improvements in the area of relationships,

> We need to develop more respect and address issues of bullying and teasing; demonstrate this in assemblies and devotions. We need to find ways of telling the same old story in new ways. Trying to keep it fresh may mean fresh faces.

> I do not mean getting rid of old teachers and replacing them with new teachers. But, maybe have special speakers; bring in outside resources. Sometimes that hits home and complements what the teachers and parents are saying and doing.

These outside resources would be good for the parents too, she suggested. Sometimes there is a breakdown in community because parents don't give enough support to the school. This could be in the area of bullying issues. Parents could be invited to special nights with an expert to speak on a specific issue. Talk about it in general; the special speaker doesn't have to know the details of the specific issue. Use these resources to help parents deal with issues at home also.

On the whole, Sonata claimed, "I am happy with the teachers. Teachers make or break Christian education for my kids. Don't compromise on the teachers. Make sure that the Christian teachers who are hired have a passion for Christian education."

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

Sonata was articulate and, I believe, represented a large sample of the parent population in the comments that she made. She emphasized the value of the teachers and the integration of the Christian faith into areas of education. The development of a Christian faith was not delegated as a responsibility solely for teachers, but parents also need to learn how to express their faith and how to show their children. Sonata felt that in the CRC culture there is not as open an expression of a faith commitment as maybe there should be. She wondered if that is a cultural thing, the Dutch people being more reserved than some other cultures. She felt that although there is a strong and deep commitment to God, the actual expression of that faith might appear to be weak. An active awareness and effort to speak about and demonstrate this faith was considered necessary for even greater faith development in the children.

Sonata mentioned three main areas of concern. She felt that politics and the hiring concerns, relationship difficulties involving a lack of respect and the closed environment that sometimes takes the form of cliques need some improvement. Many parents, although not immediately concerned, expressed wonder and hesitation about the future consequences of ECS being a part of EPS. There is undoubtedly a fear of what might happen. This fear is based on an uneasy feeling that the Christian education distinctiveness of the school might be compromised, especially in the hiring of staff that might be unable to provide an integrated Christian worldview to the students.

Of greater immediate concern to Sonata, however, were the parental concerns with disrespectful inter-personal relationships, mostly among the students. These concerns were clearly manifest in much of the data collected. Sonata's examples were typical. This did not appear as an overwhelming problem, but it was an issue that many stated needs constant surveillance and effort on the part of teachers and parents. Being Christian is about living in peaceful relationships that are up-lifting, loving and caring for each other. This life-long learning and growing experience requires daily effort.

Finally, the closed-environment concerns were discussed as factors that hinder a healthy Christian community. Interestingly, many Dutch, Christian Reformed people themselves noted this concern; however, other cultural and denominational groups did not list it as a major problem. I think this perceptive observation suggests that long-term community members have a concern for new people to the community. Awareness and a conscious effort are needed for all long-standing community participants to make the effort to reach beyond their own comfort level and embrace others that are new to the school, both those of different ethnic cultures and denominational backgrounds.

Sonata's conversation was, I believe, a typical response from a traditional, reformed, parent representative of the supporting community of ECS. Much of what she said was already clearly indicated in the results from surveys of teachers, parents and students. Her examples and suggestions give evidence of her own desire to bring healing to areas of the Christian school that she feels are needed. Ultimately, her own passion for Christian education propels her to recognize the need for change and growth toward an even greater Christian education.

Tyler

Tyler was born into a strong, Dutch, Christian Reformed family. He attended a public school throughout his years of education because there was no Christian school within the vicinity of his home. His parents were well versed in Christian education from their Dutch background in the Netherlands. As a child, Tyler was exposed to Christian education within the family situation; even within the public schools they still had prayers.

When Tyler became a parent he realized that other church families sent their children to the Christian school. Tyler felt that was expected of them also, so Tyler's children attended the Christian school.

Tyler and his family have been involved in the ECS community for many years, with he and his wife serving in various capacities. In the interview Tyler stated, "Our vision as a Christian school is clearly articulated as a measuring stick for our Christian education." Having worked with him on a committee, I knew Tyler would have a good grasp of this vision and would be able to reflect on the practical application of this vision as experienced by his family over the years.

Interview Responses

In defining Christian education Tyler said:

> Christian education is that we as Christians in our personal life want a school that teaches what is consistent with our home. We want teachings that amplify what we have in our homes and church. The Christian school needs to be a strong, academic environment that includes all the Christian values. These values should be obvious in the school as they are taught in class and in relationships from students to student and teacher to teacher.

In discussing the best things about Christian education at ECS, Tyler spoke of the integration of the Christian curriculum, community relationships and service to others:

> We articulate a Christian vision in education that is present in our curriculum, in our classrooms and in the teaching. We strive for Christian relationships between students in the classroom. Problems, whether they be physical, relational or behavioural, are addressed in class talks and we learn how to relate Christianly. People with physical disabilities are helped and encouraged… Being in this school was a positive thing for our family. We felt supported in a tremendous way. That support is still there today. It is a part of relationships, to serve others. Service to others is also important. That service is now more articulated and planned in the last few years. It happened before but now service is one of our objectives in our Vision; it is a requirement as a part of our Christian education.

In considering issues that might hinder ECS from being a more effective Christian school, Tyler spoke mostly about staffing concerns. He suggested:

> The extent to which we as ECS supporters can select and hire our staff could be a problem. It is very important that we select our own principals, assistant

> principals and teachers. We have just gone through this process and EPS did not hinder the selection process. That was my concern and is my concern over the long term.

He continued to wonder if we would be restricted within the EPS system and not able to find the appropriate personnel. If this were true, could we look elsewhere? He was, "concerned with the many changes. However, this does seem more positive and less of a concern due to the recent hiring process."

According to Tyler, a Christian teacher is one who has

> knowledge of what is means to be a Christian and knows how to make the curriculum 'Christian'. The teacher must have Bible knowledge from a Christian perspective. The teacher must have a head, heart and hands commitment to Christ. In this way the teacher can relate to students and bring their knowledge and commitment to bear on their teaching, in the relationships and in counselling situations with students.

Tyler spoke about his most memorable experiences with Christian education at ECS. He talked emotionally about his children. He said that they

> have always done well academically. They have excelled in learning. Also in the sports program our children participated and have done well. At tournaments we have been recognized as a small school doing well. But, most importantly we have seen sportsmanlike relationships with other teams. Our students give evidence of their Christian upbringing. Coaches from other schools mention it and it speaks well of our moulding our students.

Tyler stated that one child is in the senior high and "loves it." He suggested that this is

> probably more of a social statement; ...totally enjoys it and wants the high school experience to never end; ...just wants to carry on in that experience. To achieve that means lots of work, with teachers and parents working together. Parents need to be involved with teachers. Parents need to nurture their children behind the scenes. Parents and teachers talk on the phone; kids see this and it facilitates communication and partnership. ECS fosters that and the school finds that relationship great. This translates into the children enjoying school.

In discussing the impact of ECS on his own children's personal relationship to God, Tyler explained and reflected deeply on this question:

> All our children have made these commitments to God. They are strong in their faith and have reached that point of a faith commitment. The Lord works through people and situations. ECS has supported that development of a personal faith, rather than driving it. Some children in this school are not at that point yet. If the

> school were the driving force, would those children not be at the same point also? I think that the church and home are the primary reasons, driving forces, towards the development of a personal relationship with God; the school supports this. School is the support to that commitment but not the primary force. Peers are so important to leading in that direction. A lot of that commitment depends on friends. As parents we guide the relationships of our kids with their peers. School does not. These peers have a lot to do with that eventual commitment. If they went to a public school, would they have that commitment? Probably, but it fits together a little better with them going to a Christian school too.

When asked if he felt the school should "push" for more of a faith commitment, Tyler responded:

> Teachers need to make an assessment regarding the individual struggles of the students. Teachers can get involved and give advice. To be proactive in class and to have an ongoing discussion about commitment is probably too evangelistic; I don't see the school as being evangelistic. Teachers give individual attention to personal commitments of the students but cannot force the whole class. Devotional times, as a group, is a good time to challenge children.

Tyler suggested several improvements to Christian education at ECS. These included facilities, academic excellence, relationships and a visible evidence of a Christian faith. He felt that we needed larger facilities so we could service more people. ECS also needed a greater consistency of professional expertise amongst staff at different levels of Christian education. In the academic program, for example, "we need qualified people teaching subject areas such as French. Teachers need to have the ability to teach; we need expertise in academic areas."

On another occasion Tyler suggested that, in some places within the school, there appeared to be discipline concerns. Tyler claimed that, "We need to work hard to have that under control. We must work on disrespect where we find it and when it is there." He mentioned various places where there are inappropriate activities: "Some of the senior students still have drunken parties and the parents seem to support this and have no problem with it. This problem was there fifteen years ago, five years ago and even last week. Whose responsibility is it?" He wondered where responsibility for these events and situations really lie.

Tyler reflected on news reports about another school situation, where there was a fight between students and one teenager died. This event was planned and known at school. He asked the question that many people ask, "What is the school's responsibility?" Tyler suggested that,

> We need to be proactive in those situations. If we need changes, we need to do it. It is school and parents together. School can't take a hands-off approach. School staff can't solve it on its own. A Christian school community has a better chance to bring together these actions.

Tyler concluded that the Christian faith is integrated into the curriculum and it is present in relationships and in the school environment. He wondered about the necessity of more overt, physical evidence to portray how our school campuses are Christian. Should Christianity in the school be more obviously displayed in Bible texts on walls and in classrooms, like it is in some other Christian schools? He felt:

> It is not as visible on our walls. Do we exhibit that enough? In interaction with people, we will have a Christian perspective that is obvious fairly quickly. Maybe, for some visitors who just walk through our school, we need the physical evidence.

He acknowledged that there are some places in ECS where the "signs" are more obvious than others. Tyler suggested that students and staff need to live who they are and announce in words who they are.

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

I found Tyler to be a reflective, positive person who likes to think about his responses. A very real Christian community support was felt throughout difficult years faced by Tyler's family. Remembering the care and love of the community toward his family was an emotional experience for Tyler. Tyler's children have often won awards and been recognized for academic excellence; being named Valedictorian is not a new experience for them. He recognized this blessing of intelligent, healthy children who have made positive and significant choices in their Christian journey. For all intents and purposes, Tyler believed he has "an ideal, Christian family, having experienced many of the positive blessings of an effective Christian school community." This made him representative of some families surveyed.

With all of these positive experiences, Tyler's comments about the school were very affirming. Clearly, one's experience influences how one feels about a certain place. Tyler could express concern about possible, future implications of ECS association with

EPS. But, personally, he has not experienced the negative. He could suggest improvements, but in the midst of all this he constantly referred to the blessings of Christian education. Undoubtedly, Tyler feels that ECS has contributed innumerable blessings to his family. He was very positive about Christian education and especially ECS.

Teacher Interviews

Bert

Bert was a product of the Edmonton Christian School (ECS) system. Born and raised in a Dutch family, and grounded within the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), Bert's exposure to Christian education was somewhat limited in scope to one school and one culture. In his own words, "I'm a lifer." He had been in Christian education at ECS many years, having attended ECS as a student and then attending a private Christian University for a while. Upon completion of his education degree, Bert got a teaching job at ECS.

I had known Bert as a colleague for many years; he was a thinker. Bert had been involved in the school in many capacities. Bert's children attended ECS and he had taught in elementary, junior high and at the senior high campus. Bert was actively involved in writing curriculum with a Christian perspective. He contemplated his role of teacher, attempting to integrate the Creator of life into all that is done in school and life. Through discussions with Bert, I conceived the idea to continue my studies at a Doctorate level. My initial questions for my research came out of my discussions with him. However, I decided to leave that specific topic to him and I picked up on the idea, "What makes ECS a Christian school?" For these reasons, especially, I chose to pursue this topic with Bert and interview him more fully.

Interview Responses

When defining Christian education Bert said,

> The foundation for Christian education comes out of promises we made at baptism. It is our responsibility to ensure that our young people grow and mature as Christians. The school has a foundational role to promote that. Our goal as parents is that we want our children to be Christians. School is a wonderful complement to the home, giving insights well beyond what we as parents have

> been able to do. Christian education is a continuation and working out of promises we made to God.

For Bert, the best thing about Christian education at ECS was the spiritual growth in his family; Bert and his children formed lasting relationships within this Christian community. Bert claimed that it is, "a delight to see my kids challenged to think in a Christian way. They come home with ideas and thoughts. They think beyond my expectations and understand how Bible teachings relate to how they decide things." For himself, he suggested: "School is instrumental in my own faith development. Working with a Christian community, I grow and mature. I have been challenged in writing curriculum with the Christian faith perspective." Finally, Bert declared,

> Spiritual growth in my children is wonderful to see. The friends they've made and the way they think is based on their studies and the school community. It is hard to separate what part of the package has the influence. That is the beauty of community, it should all go together and be hard to separate.

Bert stated that a Christian teacher is

> a Christian person that loves God and children. A Christian teacher does a lot of modelling, being Christ-like. It means mirroring forgiveness, learning to apologize and being like Christ in words and actions… (A Christian teacher) needs an active Christian mind with the ability to read the spirits of the times with angles that students approach it. One needs to be able to actively discern quickly this is where their thinking is breaking down; this is the part of Christian thinking that they're missing. It is the ability to investigate, discern, to understand where they are coming from and lead in a Christian and Biblical way, or, at least to throw a hook out to them, not that they always pick it up. Throw out something that they can think about; not necessarily preach, but teach and work by living it.

In advising new, Christian teachers beginning their teaching careers at ECS, Bert had some suggestions. In warning he said,

> Be aware of the closed community, the 'fish bowl effect;' that can be difficult. Parents and the community may have different standards or expectations for teachers, such as how we should behave on Sundays. Certain modelling expectations are there. Different Christians have different views.

Another very important factor and personal concern was expressed by Bert, in considering what might be the factor that would make him leave the profession of teaching:

> What will make me leave the job is the time sacrifice you must make. You have to make a great time sacrifice to be an effective Christian teacher. It's almost unfair to your extended community, family and church. There is a tremendous cost to your family. (If I were to leave)… that will make me leave.

Yet, Bert recognized the value and importance of the ECS community. He claimed that this same community,

> that can be a pain, is often a blessing. You make life-long friendships, relationships and spiritual benefits beyond belief. Your devotional life and Biblical understandings grow. You can't help but experience growth as a person and as a Christian in this system because of the expectations placed on you; the Biblical integration and Christian thought makes you grow. You will experience growth just because of the nature of education and the nature of Christian education.

Bert, like many teachers at ECS, experienced a personal satisfaction in teaching. For Bert, this satisfaction was the realization of the impact his Christian teaching might have on students,

> There is no greater experience than reading that paper or comment written by a student, when an 'Ah!' moment strikes. When the student has expressed an idea and you know 'they've got it' and the Christian perspective is there. You then know that they are starting to make sense of their world, as a Christian.

Bert had many memorable experiences with his own children. The best relates to "their spiritual growth and thinking. I can pinpoint conversations with my kids and I can say, 'They get it.' For them, life begins to fit together; their Christian faith must be integrated." There was no doubt that, according to Bert, those connections were being made; they were school-based connections. The Christian perspective and their "God vocabulary" gave evidence of the depth of Christian thought. Also, Bert believed his children were constantly challenged to think in a Christian way. This challenge came from Christian teachers; different teachers make different connections with kids. Bert expressed his appreciation of the Christian community. Phone calls to parents about struggles and certain student behaviour are important to Bert. He stated that community responsibility is good. It should not be just teachers dealing with students but the proper attitude should be, "This child of ours… how are we going to have this work out…"

Without a doubt, Bert believed that ECS had been influential in the faith development of his own children. To Bert ECS remained

> an environment where Christian activities are just a part of life – songs, Bible stories, discussions – one can't help but be a part and have a relationship with God. Relationship indicates a 'getting to know.' You need to have an understanding of that person, a desire to know that person. You experience that person. There is no doubt that this relationship is there. They are in relationship with God, Jesus and Creation. These things all go towards developing a personal relationship to God/Jesus.

In considering how to make ECS an even better place of Christian education, Bert suggested that teachers:

> find ways to ensure that the Christian perspective is present in curriculum; that what we talk about is faithfully and regularly delivered. As teachers we sincerely want to and expect to present a Christian perspective, but we miss opportunities because of curricular pull, to complete the prescribed curriculum. Limited time frames and also failure to plan appropriately prevent a clear presentation of a Christian perspective in the curriculum. It is a huge challenge – are we doing enough of what we say we are doing? What are we missing that we could still do? Is it because of lazy thought or poor planning? We need to be deliberate about that. School administration must ensure that there is a plan to make it happen. The Board and administration are the keepers of the dream and vision.

Also, Bert stated, "Teachers must have a passion for relating a Christian perspective. We assume, dangerously so, that a Christian perspective comes naturally. It doesn't; it is work. Some are more gifted at it, but to presume it will happen is dangerous." To have a passion is not enough, "You can have a passion for it, but be pathetic at it." Bert explained further:

> It (Christian education) is a learned skill; there is an art to writing Christian curriculum. We haven't been good enough to have everyone work at it together. It promotes personal and spiritual growth. We need to prepare teachers to give perspective and to be more intentional in our work of doing this. To go from here to there is not enough. We want the kids to 'see the world through those Godly glasses.' If teachers cannot do that themselves, how can we expect the teachers to teach our kids.

According to Bert, this training might be a "mentoring process" or maybe it is "mutual murkiness" engaged in with colleagues, the struggle together to learn and produce.

Bert feels that, as a teacher in ECS, "Our work place is very good. Most Christians would like to talk about Christ all day long and Christian teachers get the opportunity. We have support for professional growth and spiritual growth." However, the work required to integrate a Christian perspective in every course is to have another course of curriculum that must be taught:

> It is a double duty; we teach far more than our public school counterparts. We teach curriculum and perspective. I don't think that this is acknowledged as an extra load – time wise, preparation wise, energy and emotional wise. It just adds to our busy-ness. We need more time in our schedules, to spend a day on a theme and do it either individually or with colleagues. We need to convince people that this is important and that we get time for it. The time is right to keep our vision strong as part of EPS. We need to develop staff and train those not experienced or familiar with Christian education; they need training in curriculum writing with a Christian perspective. This is a continual challenge. The Board needs to be committed to make this happen. We need time and less stress. These costs take a toll; there needs to be recognition that nurturing is needed to prevent burn out in teachers.

Bert also talked about finding solutions to our problems, especially those dealing with inappropriate behaviours and discipline requirements. He suggested several issues teachers must struggle with:

> How do we determine the importance of an individual student versus the community good? Do we put up with individuals who may be detrimental to the greater community and ask them to leave because of the benefits to the rest? Is it only a detriment now? What experiences are lost for the rest of the community because of the one or few? Does it balance out in God's eyes for some kids who suffer because of certain individuals still present. Down the road, could a student look back and say of all those struggles, 'That was me being part of a community. I saw how the teachers tried to work it. That was a sign of the community'. The difficulty is that you don't know how those things will play out long term. There seems to be no easy solution. What do we do?

In considering this dilemma, Bert proposed some practical solutions for solving some of the concerns parents have regarding their perception of how the school does or does not deal with certain issues:

> Maybe we need to dialogue more with people in the community and explain what is happening and what we are doing about it and why. It is important not to sweep it under the rug. If you keep this kid here as part of the community, for that reason, we need to make that learning more part of the classroom learning, a community working out the problem. Ultimately, there is no reason why students should not be a part of that dialogue. We may be missing a great educational opportunity if that is not there. The student should be a part. I am not sure why we are reluctant to do that. We need to find a structure to do that. How many times have kids walked away from our school and we then talk to the students? We ask. 'Were you aware of this problem?' and 'What could we have done?' But, it's too

> late then. We are reluctant to deal with it openly for fear of hurting feelings, but in reality maybe that is the way it has to be done to ensure community. It is because of students that cause difficulties we have 'sacrificial living'. This is a dialogue with all the class. Because we are a community, can the rest of us accept that we can't do something because of certain individuals' behaviours and actions. Sometimes the kids that embarrass us the most are also the kids we are the proudest of because of what our school community can do; this is a living contradiction. Since we have kids who severely affect others, maybe school should not be the one trying to solve those problems. The school can encourage and lead (as a mediator) between that family and this family. This is the Biblical principle, to go to the individual. The school has wanted to solve the problem between conflicting individuals and maybe what we should be doing is initiating communication between the parties.

People of different worldviews speak differently about their faith and commitment to God. Do the words "a personal relationship to God" mean something different for different people even though they are the same words? Bert stated that there are so many different elements to what "relationship" means:

> We live in different relationships and try to fit God into one of those "relationships." We say "personal relationship with God." For someone from another Christian worldview that may mean having a unique fire in their heart, a personal relationship; it is visible and there is an obvious passion. For someone from another worldview, like the CRC, there may be a different way of expressing faith. I believe both Christian expressions are just as deep, but the way of expressing it is different.

For Bert, "The way I deal with kids and the sharing of my own faith and thoughts, have become much broader. That is part of my own personal growth and what the school community has become as well, I believe."

In conclusion, Bert stated,

> ECS is a Christian school run by a parent Board. What vision do we need to change the direction of our ideas? When we talk about a personal relationship with God… we only get there with the leadership setting the way. Yes, individual teachers have an impact but changes have to happen in an organized fashion. There must be a vision at the top. The top level of administration must be defining what we need and what as a society we need. The Board members change often… Our society will only be as strong as the leadership and their vision. Teachers are the ones on a day to day basis that ensure that the vision is worked out. Who drives the vision? Do parents abdicate responsibility to teachers to teach perspective and set vision? What role does the teacher play? Education is only as strong as the parents. A weakness in our Christian education society is that once a person is a member and involved there should be an expectation. Parents and

> teachers should all be at Society meetings. We should take attendance and send reprimands if they are not present. We all need to carry the burden… not leave it for a few.

Bert emphasized that, sometimes, when one is not held accountable, it is too easy to just let someone else take responsibility. We then believe that "someone else is looking after it." Bert strongly advocated that the Board's role was to lead, because teachers need to focus on the classroom.

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

Much of the interview with Bert touched on important themes regarding what makes ECS a Christian school. There are no easy answers to some aspects of Christian school life that have become issues or concerns. As Bert indicated, changing an institution takes time and energy. These issues require on-going discussion.

Bert was truly impressed with how Christian education had influenced his children. He was confident that their thinking about Christianity and their ability to reflect on their relationship to Christ in their every-day life, are in direct relation to their learning at ECS. It could be simply that Bert is a reflective, active thinker himself who looks for it in others and his children are modelling their Dad. At the same time, Bert is able to analyze situations and extrapolate the learning from that situation. This seems to make it easier for him to identify how Christian education is affecting his children. I suspect that these skills in Bert enable him to claim the effectiveness of ECS whereas some other parents and adults may not be able to analyze and extrapolate the learning that has occurred in their own kids. For some, it is simply not as obvious.

Nathan

Nathan grew up in a Christian family and attended a Christian school quite similar in size and scope to (West) ECS; he attended a public high school. He claimed that he had a good foundation in the Christian school, and he suggested, "I enjoyed the public school. I guess I was glad to stop hearing the party line over and over again." Nathan compared his own education to that of his own child, "My [child] graduated from the Christian high school. He's much more articulate in spiritual matters from the experience, but he hasn't had to be exposed to 'other' thinking… When and how he will deal with the 'outside world' – I don't know."

Nathan taught for a few years in a public school in another country. The students seemed to know he was a Christian because they asked him in a wondering way. He had the opportunity to share, quietly, when he could. But, he had to be very careful not to seem Christian. Because of this, mostly, he soon went to teach in a Christian school and came to ECS.

Initially I was struck by the brevity and succinctness of Nathan's comments on the survey. However, he seemed to quickly identify concerns represented on many teacher surveys. Also, because Nathan has a close relationship with students, I felt that he would have a broader view of the issues needing to be heard and dealt with in ECS; he recognizes the students who struggle with emotional and social challenges. Also, I knew he had taught in another school system and in another country. With these different teaching perspectives, I wanted to see and hear his input.

Interview Responses

In defining Christian education Nathan said, "Education is to guide one's thinking, to mould a system of thinking. Christian education stems from Biblical thinking, trying to get kids to think, to solve, explore and examine all aspects of thinking." In Christian education "students develop a system of thought and information gathering that is based on a concept of how the world is."

Nathan proposed that Christian education is different than other forms of education. For, in Christian education, students learn to make sense of the world through the Bible. Christian education is

> education that is in sync with everything the Bible stand for. For example, God is Creator, Sustainer and in charge of the world. The Bible does not necessarily tell or show us how everything works. We are creative, inventive people made in the image of God. We learn especially, how we are to interact with Creation and God's other creatures. We are all a part of a plan. All are worthy because they are created. We need to constantly affirm things from his perspective that is in the Bible. For example, in the interactions of people we need to learn to be nice to each other, not just because you have to be but simply because they too are created. They are put in our path, under God and we have an obligation to work this out or work alongside with tolerance. I couldn't say this in a public school; there the reason for behaving in a certain way becomes, 'just because it is the right thing to do'.

For Nathan, Christian education at ECS was an integration of the Christian faith into all aspects of curriculum. The "Christian" part of Christian education was extremely important. This Christian aspect of education

> asserts the spiritual side from a Biblical perspective. We become more aware that there are thoughts that occur from somewhere else, another Being – God. There is a spiritual element of negativity where we need to teach our students to test 'the voices' against scripture. Students need to learn how to do this. Students need tools to do this, or else our students will be open to suggestions that are tragic. Christian education is to provide those tools. We are not angelic, that is a fallacy. We need to look for deeper thinking. There is so much shallowness in Junior High, talking about each other, being judgmental in the hopes of glorifying the self...
>
> We are to educate, not necessarily infuse with religion; that is the role of churches. Even if the students do not buy in now, the foundation is there. Hopefully, when protectors no longer surround our children, such as teachers, ministers and parents, they will be able to draw on what has been said and the way these role models had for solving things. I know that my foundations served me well. I was reminded of my Maker when I needed to be reminded. Hopefully our kids will have these moments and turn to the foundations that they have been taught. Christian education gives them one more aspect, one more dimension, a place or way to go for thinking. I hope what they learn in a Christian education supplements learning from the home and church.

In spite of all the benefits and the importance of Christian education, Nathan wondered if there could be a disadvantage of engaging in Christian education every day. Nathan recognized this as a possible concern:

> One of my concerns in Christian education is that if the students are always getting rich tidbits from the Bible, do they eventually get so full that they don't appreciate it? If you go on a cruise ship and have gourmet food, can it not become too much by the end of the trip? Could Christian education not have this same aspect as well? I do not believe that it is enough to have Christian education only on Sundays. If students were not in a Christian school could they survive with a weekly huddle to learn how to confront the many 'spirits.' I have chosen to send my kids to a Christian school. I don't want to take any chances.

Nathan identified the best things about Christian education at ECS as prayer, the celebration of spiritual gifts and Biblical discipline. He said,

> The spiritual gifts are listed in the Bible and these come out in the curriculum. It is good to label these spiritual gifts. It is important to learn and use proper terminology – to know the terms for spiritual discipline. For example: peace

> means 'one with a peaceful attitude'. This is a gift. We might point out that a student has the gift of giving, or listening. These are gifts besides the obvious gifts of sports and academics. Students need to hear and learn what their spiritual gifts are. We need to say that this is a gift for you, something you have been given. This makes them wonder about the personal aspect of themselves. This is so important.
>
> A Christian teacher pursues the WWJD (what would Jesus do) form of living, while considering their own personality. It should be common among Christian educators to model Christ. Students need to see how we deal with things. When we get angry we need to think about what made Jesus angry. Teachers need to think about what it is that makes them angry and ask, 'Would Jesus be angry about that?' If Jesus would not, or it is a personal and unimportant thing, than we better change that. It is okay to get angry with some things. We better be aware of ourselves as Christian educators and not be a blind leader.

For a new teacher beginning to teach in ECS, Nathan had some specific cautions based on his own life experiences in Christian education and specifically as a Christian teacher at ECS:

> Be careful about listening to everyone else's expectations. You should already have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You better draw on that. Don't look at other staff members for the way; the best staff members are themselves. Don't compare yourself to older teachers. You can ask for suggestions, but be your own boss; develop your own style …You are a Christian teacher because you love your subject and kids. Anything else is secondary, peripheral. Stay focussed on the basics. Also, pray for every one of those kids every day. The only way you can stay with where they're at is to say a prayer for them, always.

To this same beginning teacher Nathan pointed out the very real advantages of teaching at ECS:

> God rewards faithful behaviour. You will receive wonderful insights into thinking about a kid. You will see the world again in new ways. Listen to 'their world' and relive that from the perspective that you have survived. See how far you've come and give them hope. Reflect on who you are; to see the past is good. Kids will help remind you of where you were and what is important.
>
> (Also)…You get to work with one of the finest staff's anywhere. There is nothing worth more than working with Christian teachers, people who love kids and Jesus Christ.

As a teacher and a parent, Nathan had many little memories about his own children's experiences at ECS. Nathan became quite emotional as he remembered these times. Some of these include, "Teachers coming to me with quips about my children."

Around the table at home his kids would talk about school. They knew the Bible stories and this, to him, was a solid base. They talked about and discussed things from school with a spiritual perspective. Basically, Nathan suggested, "I trusted their teachers with their spiritual well-being. That is a good thing and such an important thing."

Nathan believed that ECS has been instrumental in helping his children develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He declared:

> Send your kids here and they will have a much greater likelihood that they will choose Christian thinking… There are no guarantees but the Christian thinking is a catalyst. When they leave and encounter the outside world and difficulties, they just might remember what they have learned and return to pray. They are in pretty good hands here. Sure, we make mistakes but we also work to make right our mistakes, usually.

Thinking toward future improvements of Christian education at ECS, Nathan suggested that administrators should be in classrooms. This meant either teaching a little or visiting the classrooms often and regularly. Also, he advocated,

> Board members need to be involved in the school, possibly as volunteers. They need to wander the hallways and see what's happening. They don't really have a relationship with staff members except things that they are invited to and it's set up; it's so much politics. Even if a specific Board member cannot volunteer they should have a spouse or close other who is involved. They need to have a finger or pulse on things. They need to know when things go wrong or things get broken in Junior High. They should know about it, not from some formal report but because they are there and heard the antidotes through people they trust. If teachers are disgruntled or unhappy, Board members should know those teachers and have a relationship with them, so should administration. Administrators need to be in there, too, otherwise it becomes an "us and them" situation.

Providing a good work place for teachers was important to Nathan. For Nathan, one of the important questions really is, "Who is the boss?" Nathan speculated:

> Around here lately it has become clear that it is the Board, then administration and then teachers. This happened before we became public and maybe this forced us to become public… We seem to have a top down set up; the attitude might be, 'We'll make our decisions and you'll live with it'. Instead, in a Christian organization, there should be an 'I work for you' feeling and 'you work for me' attitude. For example, in our Russian studies the Russians developed a five-year plan and said this is how it will be done. When it came down to the bottom line nobody bought into the program because they weren't invested in the program; they were not part of the decision-making process. They were just dictated to.

Nathan suggested that ECS might have some of this same problem. However, ECS now has another layer on top, EPS. This complicates things even farther:

> Our bosses have another boss and there are now lots of bosses. Everyone seems so busy keeping bosses happy. We seem to have left behind the notion that the needs of the kids are boss. The closest people to the kids are teachers. Administration should exist to make teachers work smoothly, to keep teachers from day to day cares of dealing with the administrative stuff. They should be there to support and encourage teachers. Dealing with kids is very emotional and takes a great deal of personal investment. Teachers tend not to worry about themselves until their support systems come crumbling down, then the teachers pull away from kids to meet their own needs. Teachers need nurturing too. They cannot deal with and nurture kids when their own basic needs are not met. The Board then seems to say, 'Let's get these teachers working harder' instead of saying, 'We need to nurture these teachers'. Administrators seem so busy in the top-down thinking and worrying about what the Board thinks.

Nathan quoted an old saying: "Teachers are scared of the administration; administration is scared of the Board; the Board is scared of parents; parents are scared of their kids and the kids are not afraid of anything."

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

I believed Nathan could articulate his feelings and express his beliefs about Christian education. However, I was somewhat surprised by his intensity of emotion. He seemed frustrated and overwhelmed by the many changes and negative circumstances he has perceived as affecting ECS in the past number of years, even before the joining of EPS. The amalgamation with EPS was not the focus of his concern, but his concern focused upon the breakdown in communication and team decision-making that used to be a big part of community at ECS. Nathan's sense that decisions are top-down at ECS was a frustration to him. He believed this had been in the making for a while and was not just a function of joining EPS.

In his own struggles as a teacher, he had also been a parent to very different children – all with their own personalities. However, Nathan clearly was proud them all and was grateful for the impact the Christian school had on his family. In some ways, Nathan's ponderings about his children were similar to Jasmine's thoughts; he wondered how things would turn out. Nathan clearly advocated and recognized the impact of Christian education on the life of his children. For this, he was clearly grateful, despite his own frustrations with the stress and expectations placed upon him as a teacher in this same community.

Ritch

In his early years Ritch attended a public school. In his words,

> We had prayer there and scripture reading. It was openly Christian. Later, my brothers and sisters went into the Christian school. Dad found ECS and he was impressed with the school. So, he enrolled my younger sister. I was in education studies at the University at the same time so when I graduated, I applied at this school. I came to this place because my Dad was impressed with it and he was not easy to impress. During my interview I was struck by the different terminology such as the word 'Reformed.' I didn't know the terminology but when I translated everything from "Reformed" to "Christian," it made sense.

Ritch had a great sense of humour and was quick to claim that he was not of Dutch origin. He quoted the old phrase often used to tease those who are outsiders to the Dutch community. He said, "I am not Dutch, not much."

Ritch has been teaching a long time at ECS. He is also one of the teachers not of CRC background. In fact, much of his past seems to be connected to a worldview similar to my past. I desired to hear his input, from a different cultural and denominational background, on how he perceived ECS as a Christian school.

Interview Responses

In describing Christian education Ritch said:

> Christian school is about recognizing God as Lord of Creation. This recognition comes out in different areas as we teach. God ultimately is in control, such as in the study of current events. The situations in the world cannot just be seen as gloom and doom and despair but we recognize God in all things and know the end of the story.

Ritch noted that there were some great things about Christian education at ECS. The peer support of colleagues was a real blessing; if you have a problem people pray together and search scripture for patterns to solve the problems. Ritch also felt huge parental support, "it is a great community." And, the kids are great, "When you go on fieldtrips to other places, I thank God that I teach where I do; they show love and respect to others."

Ritch felt a Christian teacher could best be described as,

> a Christian teacher to the extent that he or she is a follower of Christ. We are constrained to teach like Jesus: gentle Jesus, meek and mild also said that it would be better if a millstone hung around your neck if you were to deceive or hurt one of His little ones. A Christian teacher is to mimic Christ, be imitators of Christ. Teachers need to imitate Christ and apologize and ask forgiveness when they fail. A Christian teacher should be as Christ-like as possible, slow to speak, quick to listen and slow to anger.

Ritch had some suggestions for new teachers at ECS. He said, "You are not in this alone. If you need help, ask, and use the resources. Many teachers pretend they don't need anyone's help. Use administration and the parents and anyone else. Get the parents' perspective on a situation." At the same time, Ritch joked, "Pretend you are Dutch" and that will help, too. Finally, Ritch declared, "Worry about following Christ and the curriculum but don't take all the guilt. You are not the only one to make a difference. A child will learn when they are ready. They will do it; you just keep encouraging them."

There were many good things about teaching at ECS that Ritch identified. The peer support, administration, staff and parents are wonderful. The children have a similar background and a common belief system. Ritch felt that a teacher could make certain assumptions that the child knows what you are talking about when you talk about God. Certain truths are self-evident.

As a teacher and a parent Ritch had memorable experiences about the education of his own children at ECS. He appreciated

> the ability to discuss issues around the table, to discuss what teachers say and how to interpret it. My kids are challenged in their beliefs. They hear it at home and at school. We dialogue about disagreements or different perspectives that arise between the home and school. See the differences in Christian perspectives and celebrate that.

In considering whether ECS contributed to the faith development of children, Ritch was hopeful, but sometimes wondered if this development was actually happening. He said:

> I would like to think that happens but I sometimes wonder. I question how we do things. Do things become mere formalities, such as taking time for devotions. Devotions are about being 'devoted' to God and then it belongs to God. Often kids say, 'Hurry up and pray so we can go home.' We don't pray so we can go home. My concern is that we become ritualistic versus living in the real world. Our faith and relationship with God needs to be caught and taught. The personalization of our faith to God is important. Sometimes this relating to God,

> personally, depends on how much God is ingrained in the teacher's life, too. Some teachers promote more of a personal relationship with Christ.

Ritch continued to wonder aloud, "What does a personal relationship with Christ mean to us? And, how does this apply to us today?" He suggested that

> personal relationship building happens individually; not as a whole class. It depends somewhat on teacher modelling. Students can read insincerity. In the classroom setting students don't always see the way we live out of class 'where the rubber hits the road'. Until they are challenged about their faith, they don't really personalize it. Only when they are forced to say, 'Do I believe this?' Then, they live it!

Considering future improvements to Christian education at ECS, Ritch had some advice, "Encourage one another as administration, staff and board. We need to build one another up, rather than burn one another out. We are set up, with administration, to expect too much." Ritch had a popular quote that he has used often: "The Christian army is the only army in the world that shoots its own wounded." He felt that, "parents, board and teachers all want the administration to do it their way. Everyone wants them to be god, but 'their god.' We are admonished to bear one another's burdens; we need to consider how to encourage each other."

In determining how to make ECS a better work place for Christian teachers, Ritch advocated for tolerance and acceptance of diversity. He commented:

> We need to highlight the things that make us a better community. We need to recognize that we're all on the same journey with our own and similar struggles. If I can help you, that's fine and if you can help me, that's fine, too. Pride gets in the way of a lot of things. We then stop following the Biblical model. We need to be an encouraging community all the way around. We need to take time to thank teachers for teaching the kids. I've [worked at a specific volunteer task] for years. I'm quick to receive criticism for my [volunteer task] but nobody has ever thanked me for doing that [volunteer task]. That is pretty sad! All that time, but no thanks! ...Do we get only lip service: 'Yes, I love Christ, but I'm not encouraging fellow believers.'

In reference to politics Ritch talked about decision-making procedures. He felt that we always have had top-down decision-making:

> We are part of the bigger community. Administration needs to make decisions. They've got to make the call. Somebody is going to like it and somebody is not. Teachers, as opposed to complaining about decisions, should find out why the decisions were made. Teachers need to try to understand these decisions as for the

> benefit of the whole school. We need to model Christ; having a 'mind like Christ, who emptied himself.' The world does not revolve around me or you.

According to Ritch, all community members needed to follow Biblical principles to bring healing. He believed that, together with Christ, we should aim to be one. Most importantly he believed we needed to, "Recognize that Jesus is Lord of all. If that means I have to do something that humiliates me or degrades me, so be it; Christ did it too."

Researcher's Reflections on the interview

Ritch maintained a positive attitude about ECS. Although he could identify areas that need improvement, he clearly has found his place as a Christian teacher in Christian education. He fits comfortably within ECS despite the fact he obviously has a different cultural and denominational background. With a good sense of humour and a strong personality, Ritch has overcome differences that he might have experienced as a contributing member of this Dutch, Christian Reformed community.

Ritch is known for his straight talk; he speaks it like it is. He has been a diligent student of God's Word; he quotes scripture in and out of the classroom. He believes in talking the talk and walking the walk. Ritch was quick to see different points of view and he often indicated that differences among community members are to be celebrated rather than tolerated. He believed that conflict and differences are easily resolved if people would just turn to Scripture and follow God's principles.

I admired the positive, committed determination of Ritch to uphold the standards that he believes are inherent in the Christian faith. He seemed able to accept differences and to celebrate these differences as illustrative of God's creation. Without a doubt Ritch attempted to explain discrepancies and advocate for peace by reminding people that if we all follow the ways of God, we will solve all our problems.

There are times, however, in talking to Ritch that I can't help but think that his faith, and maybe his answers, are possibly too simple: Is the actual living of the Christian faith that simple? Maybe I don't have that simple child-like faith that believes resolutions are possible by just believing and living by Biblical principles. The very question 'What is Christian?' comes into play here. The definition of what is "Christian" in the naming of a Christian school is obvious at this point. I can't help but remember that Christians throughout the ages have attempted to live by their interpretation of the Biblical principles. The problem seems to be that, although they may be Christian, they have various opinions of Scripture and their ways of viewing the world are different. A difference in worldview does not always make it easy for Christians to agree on a solution, especially if they all believe they are following God's principles. The variety of Christian denominations that exist in our world, prove that this is a challenge. Thus, living together in community is not easy.

I find it interesting that, in his initial interview at ECS, Ritch simply translated the word "Reformed" to mean "Christian" and then all was well in his mind. He could understand their language. I wondered, though, if they really were speaking the same language; in fact, different Christian worldviews were essentially connecting. At the same time the overall structure was "Christian;" it was only the fine points of history and interpretation that ultimately would separate the worldview differences. I can't help but wonder if they ever were or ever will speak the same language.

Nevertheless, I appreciate that although Ritch's worldview is different than many members of the ECS community, he has a vital role to play. He remains a positive, affirming Christian teacher who strives to influence those around him by his walk and his talk. His is one Christian worldview; interestingly, he has been accepted and appreciated within this community that, in general, speaks a somewhat different Christian language.

Student Interviews

Sasha

Sasha was an above average student who had always attended ECS. Her family had been a stable and contributing force to ECS. For the most part Sasha attended the Christian Reformed Church but had several friends involved in other evangelical denominations. Sasha attended Youth Conferences and participated in the religious activities of other denominations. Her exposure to other views and ways of expressing faith was clearly evident.

I have known Sasha for about five years. Sasha was chosen because her survey was very complete with lots of writing and ideas. This indicated to me her interest in the subject. She also presented a personal, well-articulated response with several statements being typical of many other student responses in the surveys. At the same time, she seemed to have an additional depth of understanding and/or experience with reflecting on her faith and life experiences.

Interview Responses

In describing Christian education, Sasha said:

> God is a big aspect of our lives. In a Christian school God is incorporated into all of life, the family and parents, Christian teachers and even in making Christian friends at school. The subject matter also incorporates God, such as in science classes. Sending children to our school (ECS) is a commitment to support our school and the ideas, not contradicting these ideas. School is not a place of perfection, we are not angels, ... sure it's a Christian school but still all the students are human. Some may be stronger Christians than others. They may show their beliefs more, but not everyone is going to be an angel. They are going to have hard days and not everyone is always going to be nice… the whole environment is going to be better. People are learning and growing and trying to support each other in God. That is the goal of Christian education.

Sasha had some additional advice to parents considering a Christian education for their children:

> Don't send your kids to our school only to make them 'nicer' or improve their behaviour or grades. That's not what Christian education is about. If the students and parents can't think of better reasons for enrolling in our school, then maybe it's not the right school for them. It sounds harsh, but it's true. It is 'Christian' education. The above reasons or wishes can come true at our school but understand that it comes about with major help from God. He's a BIG PART of our school so He should be a BIG part of the decision to enroll in our school too.

Sasha believed that the best thing about Christian education at ECS was the teachers, God incorporated into everything and Christian friends to support you. Sasha said,

> Having Christian teachers is the most important. Teachers are big role models. They influence what people believe. It is important to know that teachers support and help you. They teach the way God wants you to live. You can go to them and they can help with your problems, using a Godly perspective.

Teachers are "trying to be like God all the time. It is kind of like a learning experience with them. They are learning too, but also teaching you (the students)." With regard to the curriculum, Sasha advocated:

> God is incorporated into everything. It might be harder to relate God to some subjects, like math; if you are talking about right angles this may be difficult to incorporate God. But, in areas of science and social it is easier. For example, our

> schoolwork is related to God and our studies show us a Godly way. In our studies of globalization we also talked about Jubilee 2000. In learning science we talk about different points of view in creation of the world but ultimately that God created the world. God is not left out. Your views are shaped to a Christian viewpoint because God is put into all that you are learning. You see how God is related or connected to all you study about life and the world.

Also, Sasha recognized the value of the community:

> Christian friends to support you are also a very important part of ECS. It is like the teachers who learn with you. Friends and teachers share the same beliefs. This is the biggest common bond and helps us to support each other. Even though not perfect and we don't always get along, we support each other. We are all in a Christian school for the same reason, our belief in God and our common knowledge that Christian education is a key way to develop and strengthen our faith.

In considering hindrances to Christian education at ECS, Sasha thought:

> Students and staff are sometimes afraid just to fully surrender this school and its environment to God. Surrendering is hard to do; it is a roadblock. Going to a Christian school you'd think we'd be open in worship or talking about Jesus. But, sometimes we are afraid people will tease us or make fun of us. For example, one person was making a Christian website for Christians on the computer. Some other students went in and showed him a computer porn site just to make him angry. Some students don't feel the freedom to talk about God, like you would expect in a Christian school. The teachers are freer but just letting everything centre around Him is hard. Sometimes teachers seem unsure; they don't know what students will think. They don't want to be seen to be pushing God down our throats. They don't want it to be seen that one has to believe in God in order to be accepted or normal; some students are not Christians. So, teachers may feel they need to be careful in this way.

Sasha also talked about "mindsets" needing to be changed to improve the Christian education at ECS. She claimed that:

> This is education, but it's also worship. We're here to learn, to get basic knowledge. The higher up you go in the grades the more complicated it gets in knowledge. But, we are not here to learn just a basic view of God as part of our academics but that everything is centred on God. At some Christian schools, they have amazing chapels and singing. They have prayer groups and prayer sessions and these people aren't afraid to share their faith… (At ECS) we don't have this kind of environment. We have some of that but not as much. For example, we had the opportunity to pray around the flagpole. Everyone was invited but only about 10 out of 200 students that go to the High school came. That was very disappointing; that people can't make that a priority in life. They think we go to a Christian school and that's enough, we don't need this extra.

Sasha believed, "A different mindset is needed to realize that this is a life commitment. You send your students to this Christian school but it is more than that, it is a lifelong personal commitment. The Bible tells us to worship God in *everything* we do, which means that school should be a constant place of praise."

According to Sasha, some changes need to be made to make ECS an even better Christian school. One thing Sasha and her friends try to do is to change the chapels, "We stand in the front row and do actions (participate) in the singing. Some students' attitude is that they don't want to be here; but, we want to change that, to make it a good place to be."

Sasha joined the Student Council to try to have an impact on things needing changes. One thing Sasha wanted to do was make students feel even more comfortable at ECS, "We say good things, like 'hi' to the grade 10s and not do the intimidation thing. We were intimidated by grade 12s. We want to make sure that everyone feels welcome. They don't have to be scared; we want them to know we're here to support them, not make life miserable."

Sasha stated enthusiastically, "It's our school. We're proud that they are here. We're glad they made the decision to come here. We are going to make everyone feel supported." Sasha declared that sometimes it was very hard to make changes. Everyone cares what people think; it really does matter:

> You want people to like you. I want people to like me because they see God in me. I don't want to be teased, 'there is a freak; she's just so self-righteous.' I have a friend who acts self-righteous. I don't want to be that way, or scare off other people by seeming holier than them. Some see us in chapels and probably think that we are dumb, but others don't. We do it because we have fun. We laugh but we are praising God. Intimidation is usually done by the older students. The changes need to be done by older students, who have more power. They don't have anyone to sneer at them because they are the oldest people in the school.

Sasha wondered if it would be easier to share about God in a non-Christian environment than in a Christian school. She said:

> Everyone in our school knows about God and knows what they should be doing, but they are not always doing it. You don't want to go and tell them because they know and they say they know but they're not acting like a Christian. You don't want to tell them that they have to act differently and be a better Christian. In a non-Christian school people don't know about God so your example is more

> noticeable. People may ask what is different about you and you have a chance to talk to them and tell them. People in our school don't ask about why you are different because they already think, 'Oh, she believes in God and that's why she's friendly.' A girl in my summer school asked me about that. It was so new to her; she had never heard about God. It was easier to share my faith. I was not repeating things she'd already heard. It did not feel like preaching, just sharing. The same thing goes with strangers. I can't seem hypocritical to people who don't know me. I'm not by any means perfect so it's hard for me to tell people who I know and who know me, to be like Christ, when I have a hard time embodying His virtues myself.

Christian teachers are so important. Sasha claimed:

> A Christian teacher is someone always trying to be like Jesus. Of course, teachers get upset with students, but students know you care and that they can come to you. Students should see God in the teacher by their talk and actions. Sometimes we hear about things teachers do and say outside of the school. We see their example not only at school but outside school as well. It has an impact on us. If the teachers talk about how we should believe and do as Jesus did, but we know or heard something he or she did outside of school that is not right, our trust in their example is gone. It is harder to believe their words. For example, some teachers have said rude comments about somebody or did something to somebody such as racist jokes or sexist comments. You think they are your role models, but then you hear these things and it's very disappointing.

At the same time, Sasha saw that Christian teachers sometimes struggle to make God real to the students. She declared that teachers sometimes seem to

> struggle to make God seem real for us, even in religious classes. Teachers sometimes think everyone's heard the message about God and they give less detail. When we've heard it before, they need to say it in a different way, another way. We've heard the information about what God wants us to do and be… we need more or something about a personal relationship with God. We don't get that very much. We hear about what God wants us to do. We need more about interacting with God, having a close relationship with Him. We need to hear more about surrendering to God; this needs to be a focus too.

In her survey, Sasha talked about Christian education as, "tying Biblical principles and Christ into everything." She went on to say that at ECS, "It's close, but definitely not all the way there." In explaining more about this Sasha stated:

> The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) tries to focus on God watching the whole world and it's not very personal. We're taught to pray but not to have a deeper relationship with a personal God. God is in our community; community living is emphasized more. We do not dwell on God as a close friend, talking to Him like you would a close friend. We can interact with Him so much. This is quite

> different than saying that God's up there and we know what we have to do… ask forgiveness and all… but what about the personal relationship. I went to Youth Conference (not CRC) and it was so different. They talk about a personal relationship, knowing God one-on-one. It means interacting with God one-on-one and He is there for you, for everyone else as well, but to know he's there for me, that's personal. I've always known that you are supposed to get close to God, your Father, like an authority figure. You're a little bit wary of Him. But, God is more than that. We surrender to Him and 'open up' to 'draw closer to Him'. I have been exposed to these ideas outside of school. Our parents and most of the teachers, too, grow up in the CRC environment and their focus is not always, or even usually, this way. They do not often talk about a personal relationship with God.

As a student at ECS, Sasha gave some advice to those making decisions about the future of ECS. She replied,

> I've talked about how our school does not emphasize a personal relationship with God but at the same time ECS does help in our faith, in our understanding about God, although not directly, with a personal relationship with God. At ECS you are taught basic truths to base your life on. The school provides the knowledge, the basic truths; that is a foundation and I know what to build on and how to live in my life. Then I go to Youth Conferences and because I understand the basics I can build even more on what the school is teaching and what I learn and experience in Youth Conferences. I can practice and experience a personal relationship with God. At school we focus on knowledge, not so much on a personal relationship with God. Chapel is an example, though, where we can practice and experience a personal relationship with God. That's why we'd like to change it to be even better… and more personal. Students should go home feeling revived and renewed because of the environment they're spending their days in.

Sasha was firm in her support for ECS:

> Definitely keep the school. Always maintain a focus on God, not on money or better equipment. Keep God at the focus and be open to other people coming in. I'd send my kids here. It's really good (at ECS) right now but work on the personal relationships… that Jesus is a big part of everything. Continue assemblies and make sure a personal relationship is talked about. Also, make older students understand and realize their responsibility to welcome and support younger students, not to intimidate them. They play a big role. Make students accept this challenge, a challenge for all students. We now have a group wanting to make changes and we are talking more about it. At our service project, during devotions we had some good worship. We didn't talk much, but we sang a lot. Seeing my whole class praising God in this way was awesome. Changes are happening. I think we need to sing more and have praise and worship. We don't have enough chapel. We need the right music but not just music; people need to talk and maybe explain songs so some understand the words better. We need

> inspirational words; not everyone likes singing but I think it draws people closer together to sing and worship God.

Finally, Sasha said:

> We need people united. There is a common bond. We have a good Christian School and community. We need everyone to work together for the same common good, parents, students and teachers WITH God and FOR God. I heard a story… about a preacher (not CRC) who was talking about how he didn't like all these separate religious schools but he really liked ours. He liked our schools because he knew that the parents and teachers weren't trying to separate or isolate the kids from the rest of the world. They weren't pushing their noses up at the rest of society because it was evil and they wanted their children as far-removed from it as possible. He knew the reason for the Christian schools was to educate children in something that the parents, truly, strongly believed in and wanted their children to know about. He knew we weren't shutting the door on everyone else; we want them to join in on the **God-learning** (my made up word!). We had created Christian schools for everyone who wanted to know about God, regardless of race, culture and even beliefs. He didn't think this was true of the rest of the religious or private schools. They were shutting themselves off. I think that as long as people everywhere can clearly see and believe as this pastor, whether they be Christian or not, then at least one of the goals of Christian education is being met. Some of the above story is what I feel makes a Christian school Christian.

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

I found myself amazed at Sasha's ability to express her faith so clearly; she was both thoughtful and reflective about her faith. Clearly she has pondered this topic. Sasha responded to my questions with concrete statements supported by personal examples. She gave the typical reformed view responses to some questions and indicated that these beliefs and values have been instilled in her from a very early age through exposure to her Christian family, church and school experiences.

From my experience with members of this community I could see her initial responses as evidence of what it means to live a Christ-centred life. Sasha's vision of life and her responsibilities as a Christian were similar to those expressed in the vision and mission statements of ECS. Her views were indicative of her experience and nurture in a family with a reformed worldview, complemented by her regular church attendance at a CRC church and her daily attendance at ECS. These experiences, she claimed, shaped her views and formed the basis of her beliefs. She called the teachings from these three avenues the "basic truths."

However, what most surprised me was Sasha's expression of her faith in ways that I have not seen typical in the Reformed and supporting community surrounding ECS. From my personal background, a more evangelical approach to Christianity, I saw glimpses or, more accurately, a whole series of references and experiences that indicate Sasha's exposure and expression of her faith that includes another worldview. Sasha referred many times to a "personal relationship" with God. She talked with a great deal of excitement and animation about this personal relationship with God. She was "alive" at these times and clearly motivated and energized by these experiences. She kept referring to the desire for others to experience this personal connection to God and she indicated that several of her friends, and herself, have been trying to make these changes at ECS. In her view, Sasha and her friends wanted to model what it meant to worship and live their lives giving evidence to their personal relationship with God.

I deviated from my questions to point out her excitement and the expression of her faith. I asked Sasha how she had come to this point in her faith. Where had she experienced or encountered these expressions, this visible energy and enthusiasm to "change the world?" She indicated that the basic truths of God and life were solidly founded in her reformed family, church and school experiences. However, she has a very good friend or friends who attend an evangelically-based school with a worldview that causes them to expresses their faith in a much more outward worship and lifestyle. Basically, Sasha had attended youth groups and conferences where speakers and musicians had led the young people in worship experiences to deepen their "personal relationship with God." These experiences and her relationship with these Christians, from a differing Christian worldview, have exposed Sasha to another way of worship, another way of expressing her faith.

This was the clarity I sought. Although this concept of a personal relationship with God is not new or foreign to the reformed worldview expressed at ECS, it is clearly not as prevalent and commonly expressed in the same way Sasha was expressing her faith. The pieces of the puzzle began to fit together. I was wondering where this expression of her faith had originated. From my own experiences, I recognized her use of the language and her visible excitement and animated face, hand and body language as expressions of a Christian worldview not normally part of the reformed worldview connected to the supporting community of ECS. I was impressed by Sasha's adaptation of her strong faith, instilled as a young child, to her new expression of her faith that has been acquired in recent years.

This turn of events was a wonderful revelation. Knowing Sasha's family and the ECS community and knowing the evangelical community with which Sasha had been associating, I clearly saw an amalgamation of two worldviews. It was quite a wonder! I found myself fascinated by this unexpected circumstance. It was, therefore, refreshing to hear Sasha's opinions. She could approach this question and my interview questions with a broader experience base, I expect, than could most other students, parents or even teachers.

I wondered that Sasha had found her faith and could express it at such a young age. Sasha's expressions of her worldview were indicative of an evangelical worldview that promotes a different emphasis on the Christian life. Many of my own faith struggles over the years have been to accommodate my personal, early faith experiences to my later more reformed, intellectual responses. I could identify with Sasha's expression that ECS has set the basic truth while her outside-of-this-community experiences had given new life and energy to her faith.

Jesse

Jesse was an average student attending ECS. His claim to fame, thus far, was his athletic ability. Bookwork was a necessary "evil;" he realized education was important but his real interest was sports. His family had been a stable and contributing force to ECS and Jesse attended the Christian Reformed Church. In many ways, Jesse might be considered representative of many students that had been in long time attendance at ECS.

I have known Jesse for over four years and I chose because his responses on the survey were representative of responses made by other students. There were other, far more articulate males whose surveys I considered, those who may have been more like Sasha in their detailed responses and clearly reflective views on the subject. However, I wanted another point of view, one from a clearly athletic student mind. Sports are an important part of school life at ECS. Thus, I wished to hear a more detailed response from someone, considered by many, to be a typical athlete. In his words he is "the school jock." At the same time, I wanted someone who could likely think and respond intelligently, having had a history with ECS and with the reformed worldview.

When I initially contacted Jesse to be interviewed, he seemed surprised to be asked. However, there was no hesitation. Nevertheless, he wondered why I would ask him and he hinted that he didn't feel he would be as competent or fluent as some of his peers. I informed him that I wanted to hear his views and that I was confident that he was who I wanted to talk to in more detail. I believe that the fact that I already had a relationship with him was important; he seemed quite relaxed and was very willing; he even seemed honoured to be chosen.

Interview Responses

In discussing Christian education, Jesse said,

> Christian education is about an attitude towards God. It is an atmosphere. It begins in class when the teachers take time to talk about students and their life. We have devotions and pray. Teachers see what's troubling the student, such as a death in a family and the class would stop and pray about it.

He perceived that, "In the public schools it is just getting right down to work and there might be more gangs. In a Christian school everybody is a little bit nicer to each other and there are more cliques in the public school than we have here."

Jesse considered that the best things about ECS were the teachers, the way they teach and the good relationships with other people. Jesse considered that teachers were really important. They get involved and ask, "How's it going?" It is a personal thing. In the public school they are so much bigger and less personal; everyone gets right to work. Here (at ECS) teachers ask about you.

Jesse thought that, "The way teachers teach is great. They teach about God, telling us examples and setting a good example of how to live. They do not teach straight from a text. In social we had a test and one question was about 'what would God want the government to be if He was the Ruler'?" He claimed not to be surprised by this question because students were often asked how their lives are affected by Christian beliefs and how they should deal with things. He stated that, "There is more worship of God here in our learning."

Jesse went on to say that ECS,

> is more than just a place to work and learn. It is a place of caring. You don't get beat up; it is a nicer place. It is like 'easy-going.' We are not pressured, maybe we do not finish every unit but that is okay. This helps me go through the day, not too much pressure. We are more relaxed at school, not pressured. People usually act good towards other people. We do have respect for each other. Maybe we could be more involved and caring with others in the school; this would be good.

At the same time Jesse identified an area of weakness at ECS. He said that "attitude and respect from student to student," could use some improving. For example, "maybe taking a pen is not such a big deal but it happens and it shouldn't." He discussed that a bigger deal is that you would expect to come to a Christian school and be treated kindly, not put down or teased because you are different. At this point he claimed, "We do need to be more accepting. People are made fun of a lot of times."

To support this statement with an example, Jesse claimed that he was a member of a sport team, outside of the school,

> There was a boy with a lisp problem. He was made fun of lots and in our school that happens too. Coming to a Christian school one would expect people to be open and accepting of all people no matter how different they are. We should be like that, open and caring for everybody no matter who or what they are. We shouldn't only be stuck to kinds of people we like and avoiding those who are different and maybe have a lisp.
>
> Even amongst classmates they make fun of each other. If someone even squeaks, classmates get on them right away and make fun of them. They are little things, but they build up. On another occasion, outside of school, I was on a sport team where there were mostly non-Christians. Nobody made fun of others. We were just out to play some [games] and have a good time. Whatever happened we wouldn't make fun of each other but just laugh about it and have a good time. When you come to a Christian school that's what should happen too. Whatever happens, happens. Let it go and move on. The non-Christian … players were more Christian than some Christians at ECS. The attitude and respect people and students have towards each other is something we need to work on.

Jesse felt that it was easier to be a Christian in a Christian school:

> You are not an outsider. We share the same beliefs. Things are not as controversial. At Christmas we celebrate Christmas and we all know what that means. God is known about; He doesn't have to be explained. These special celebrations are important; we recognize together that we have common beliefs. We are sharing the same beliefs. We all know Jesus was born and died for us. We know this and we pray. On a different level, even though we know this and say

> we are Christians, we still have our own problems between each other; we have conflicts. We know how we should act, but doing it is hard.
>
> We have a good talk but it is real hard to live that way. On the [sport] team (at ECS) when we go somewhere else to play, we do our best to act what we know but in our own place, our home school, we all are Christians and we know this so we don't think we have to show, or act, so much like we are Christians. We should, but we don't. We don't feel we have to make the effort to show the Christian actions. We can be whom we are without having to show it. Sometimes we are good naturally and sometimes we do not do well in our actions.

Jesse expressed his views on a good Christian teacher:

> He or she is interested in you and has a good, caring attitude. They talk to you; they are interested in you personally and it helps a lot. They ask about you, such as 'How's your game going?' and 'What team are you on now?' Christian teachers have a caring and good attitude; they compliment you. They talk about God. At this school, teachers give you confidence that you are okay. We have a higher self-esteem; you feel good about yourself. Teachers value you and because teachers are Christian they show how they are Christian and you want to be like that. Teachers have good attitudes; they are encouraging and try to help you work out problems. There is not much swearing and the attitude like, 'Hey, you punks' is not there, like it might be in other public schools. People are not pushing you around. We know who the troublemakers are but it's not nearly as bad or a big deal as in other places. Discipline is a good thing that teachers must do. But, sometimes the teachers push too hard and expect too much. Like, for example, I am a good athlete but if I don't push myself in Track and Field, which is not my favourite sport, they get on that and push me. It's not really a problem here. I think the teachers are good Christians. They don't swear or get mad at me and other people. And, Christian teachers have a good attitude, a good way of teaching; they do not just stand in front of class saying words. They show diagrams, do group work and lots more. That is a nicer way of teaching than just jotting down notes.

ECS has played a role in helping Jesse develop a personal relationship with God. He claimed that he thinks twice about doing certain things that are not Christian, such as stealing, sex and doing drugs: "Here, at ECS, we are taught to stay away from these things. I guess I've been protected from bad things that might harm my life. We know in our hearts what God would not want us to do and what God would want us to do." On more careful pondering, Jesse suggested that his "personal relationship with God has grown mostly with my family and parents and not so much in school. But, putting me in a Christian school keeps me on the right path during the day; I learn about God, too." He went on to say that at ECS students could work on this area of developing our personal relationship with God, "Teachers could talk to each student even more. They could build on the relationship with the student to feel comfortable and talk about God more personally."

Toward making ECS a better Christian place Jesse advised the following:

> Have more respect among students. Work to improve the talk about a personal relationship with God. Get more involved with students; build relationships. That is not really weak, but new kids, even non-Christians, may come and that relationship will need to be there. We can't jump on them about God but build a relationship that leads to talk about God. Don't talk about God all the time, though.

In conclusion, Jesse adamantly expressed that, in the future, he would send his kids to a Christian school, in order to

> send them on the right path. If I'm not always there for them, then the school will help out. Teachers and school are like a complement to family life in an educational kind of way. Parents and students and the school work together. There is a common bond; that is important. I trust people in Christian schools, the teachers and students. I'd feel confident with my child talking to Christian teachers. With the Christian teacher, the Christian way would be promoted. I would want that.

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

Jesse's initial comments, after I reviewed the purpose of the interview and the process, were to indicate again that he didn't think he would have much to contribute. Also, he figured he would likely only be able to give "yes" or "no" answers. He did not, however, limit himself to one-word answers, as he feared. He worked hard, sometimes, to say more and I would ask the questions again in slightly different ways.

He clearly thinks the school is wonderful. Initially, there was nothing that could be changed and there were no hindrances to a Christian education at ECS. He constantly compared his experiences at ECS to what he believed a public school would be like. His view of the public schools was not very high, although he has had no experience in these schools. This is an interesting finding, I believe. He did comment that his references to public school life were based on hearsay and conversations with students who attend public schools; Jesse has had many experiences with community league teams and sports training teams. He suggested that he has heard lots about life at public schools due to his exposure to and his relationships with other athletes.

As the interview progressed, I managed to get Jesse to focus on ECS as a *Christian* school. I asked him to think of ways ECS could improve on being a Christian school. Again, he wanted to compare ECS to another Christian school but claimed he didn't know much about other Christian schools. When I suggested that he think about what a perfect Christian school would look like, he was able to contribute ideas. With a little help from me, and because I know Jesse's class very well, we were able finally to discuss what life is really like in his classroom. At this point, Jesse was then able to express lots. I had wondered how much he would contribute; and, although I found him sometimes hard to follow, his ideas would bounce all over the place and he repeated himself lots, Jesse did have significant things to say. I was impressed with how positive he felt about ECS, from the point of view of a self-labelled "jock."

I felt the most important thing he said was to compare his personal experience on a sport team with his experiences in the classroom. On the sports team, with all non-Christian guys but himself, Jesse expressed surprise at how these athletes had not been into put-downs. They supported each other and encouraged each other, even when someone made mistakes. Instead of teasing and berating each other, they were accepting of each other. Jesse commented that this would not have been the case in his classroom. Some students would have been making fun of those who made mistakes. He noted with some surprise, and he seemed to realize it for the first time himself even as he talked with me, that some non-Christian sports team players acted more Christian than do some of the kids in his class.

In expressing what makes ECS a Christian school, Jesse gave somewhat typical answers, "Teachers direct you in the right path. There is talk about God. We pray and have devotions, but it is not rammed down your throat." He often referred to the style of teaching as being Christian. He liked the "easy-going" manner, the personal talking before class, teachers interested in the personal life of the students, working in pairs and groups and having class discussions, not just teachers giving notes and memorization.

In contrast to Sasha's responses, Jesse did not refer to a "personal relationship to God" on his own. He gave what I have been describing as a basic, theoretical, intellectual, reformed worldview response. Even at times, I was not sure that he totally captured the idea of this, but I suspect it was due to his inability to articulate any more and to his immaturity. At this age most students have not yet appropriated the Christian faith for themselves. They are still greatly under the influence of the home, church and school. When asked directly about a "personal relationship" to God, he talked about learning about God and living it. Clearly, his Christian worldview experiences are different than those expressed by Sasha.

Upon completion of the interview, I thanked Jesse and informed him that his responses and ideas were very worthwhile and that I appreciated his input. He thanked me in his familiar way, "Well thank you! And, thank you for taking me out of school to do this." What a typical Jesse response!

In conclusion, I believe that Jesse was a good choice. As a self-labelled jock, I realized how much he had grown up since I had taught him years before and yet how much he was the same. He seemed to present what I suspect was a very traditional, often non-reflective response to what makes ECS a Christian school. The teachers were the ultimate necessary factor. They made his life at school worthwhile and the "easy-going" style was to his liking. I tried to investigate more what he meant by "easy going." I suggested that he felt comfortable or accepted. He claimed, "yes" with enthusiasm and possibly some surprise. He proceeded to explain that he felt the school gave him good self-esteem and that he wanted to be here. He did feel comfortable and relaxed and that to him was the "easy-going" aspect.

I suspect Jesse's greatest satisfaction with ECS was that he was allowed to be who he is. He feels honoured and respected at ECS. He has a place and feels worthwhile. He felt supported and encouraged by teachers. He felt guided, but not overwhelmingly pushed or forced, most of the time. In general, he felt things were good, because he felt good. For him, this was the essence of good Christian teaching by Christian teachers.

I believe Jesse's interview responses are typical of many of the students surveyed, based on the survey responses. I suspect that many students at ECS would struggle to express their faith and that many would respond as did Jesse. However, this typical, reformed worldview was present. The emphasis on community and everything in the world belonging to God was definitely portrayed in his expression of his faith. In some ways, these expressions were indications of children who have yet to adapt their parents' religious views to their own life experiences. Their faith may not truly be their own, yet.

Cathy

Cathy attended ECS all her life, except for a short stint in another country. She identified herself as a very committed Christian Reformed Church (CRC) kid; she expressed pride in her church denomination and school. She was a "good student" and also "active on a sports team."

I chose Cathy because her survey was extremely articulate and well detailed for a junior high student. She made several statements that I wanted to explore further. Also, some of the factors she mentioned were quite typical of other student responses. There were several student surveys from her campus that I could have chosen. In the end, I just picked Cathy.

Interview Responses

For Cathy, Christian education was learning things like you would learn in another school but also learning about God at the same time. When teachers teach, they ask questions and make comments about how God fits. On tests they ask questions that allow the student an opportunity to write about God, telling how God fits into this. According to Cathy this was most easily done in science, social and language arts, when you can talk about God in creation and look at literature.

Cathy claimed that the best things about Christian education were devotion times, singing, sports teams and relationships. Devotions, singing and chapel times are her favourites. Her class gets to sing every Monday morning. She stated,

> You are happy to come to school and do this. We are so small that we all know each other. All junior high students go to chapel; throughout the week, we sing in class every morning. Mostly the girls sing; some guys sing too. It is singing that lets us 'get into the day.'

As well, sports teams are really important. Cathy said, "I am really into sports. We get along with other teams. Everyone knows we are Christians, from that Christian school. We are not afraid to pray before games and we do that publicly." Finally, relationships were pretty good, "If someone is being picked on we have a devotion and realize we shouldn't do that so everyone tries harder and we get along. Most students really want to make it work, being a Christian."

Cathy also believed that, "the public system effects us because they are slowly limiting the things that we do. Before we were a Christian school we always had

Christian substitute teachers. Sometimes now we don't. We could end up with teachers that are not Christian." Also, she suggested that, in the past, new students were interviewed and they fit our beliefs. Now, with the new kids, "the tone of our class has changed a lot." She talked about one kid who did not fit in. People in the class have made an effort to include him, but he doesn't want to participate; he doesn't seem to want to be Christian. Cathy thought that it might be the same way for him in other schools. She claimed that a lot of students in the school are CRC and he was not; that could be a major difference. But, other people in the class were not CRC and they still get along and seemed to fit in."

Cathy identified what she believed to be another problem:

> Now that we are public, more people that are not Christian come to our school and they don't think that this school is cool enough for them so they have to convince others…(It is)… hard when kids who are not Christians come to our school. Most of them are ashamed of this school when they first come. The people that have been in this school since kindergarten really enjoy it. When the new kids start saying, 'this isn't cool' and stuff like that, then the older kids, who have been here a long time, start bashing our school too. I don't think that would have happened without the new (outside) kids making some feel or notice the differences between us and other schools. Sometimes, they pick on the fact that we are really small and protected. We don't go off the school grounds at all. We just don't function like the public school.

According to Cathy these new students said, "In other schools there is more freedom." Last year, she noted, a couple of people were going out and they weren't allowed to do anything. They'd get in trouble for holding hands. That was a major thing last year. She claimed that the new kids thought "holding hands at school was not a big deal. This has influenced my classmates a lot." There seemed to be a group of students who were positive and really like the school; they've been around for a long time. Then, there was another group of newer students, who do not feel as positive.

As well, Cathy really liked the teachers. She said,

> Christian teachers can't be perfect but they try as hard as they can to teach us and guide us along. We are studying denominations in our class. My teacher is not CRC, but [my teacher] never said we (CRC) were wrong and so many of us are CRC. [My teacher] never said we were wrong, but just different. [My teacher] never said anything bad about anyone else, either. I don't know if a Christian teacher teaches differently but maybe more effectively. They show that God is more amazing as they talk about the subject with God in it.

Sometimes, Cathy said the teachers did not always act like we think Christian teachers would or should act:

> When teachers go off campus for school activities such as sports, yearly camping trips and skiing, you find that they are not 'perfect' Christians after all... When you go away on field trips you find out more about whom your Christian teachers really are. Sometimes they do things that they shouldn't do. For example, on one trip they encouraged students to have a competition to see who can drink the most McDonald's orange drink. They later admitted that they shouldn't have done that; it was not a good thing to do. Sometimes they make poor decisions but then they tell us that was wrong. They realize that we are looking up to them. Sometimes we are surprised by their behaviour. At school they might be really strict because they have to be, but then they might be a lot more fun outside of school.

According to Cathy, teachers needed to work hard to treat students fairly. Sometimes you see that teachers have favourites, "This happened to my brother. If he and his friend hand in the same thing, done the same way, the other student will do much better. When he has worked with that other student he has done better and got better marks. He really notices the difference." Teachers should not try to embarrass a person in class. They don't yell at them or anything, but they will discipline them. If two people are fighting, the one not so favoured might get sent into the hall and the other not. This favouritism might show up in marks and the consequences in discipline.

According to Cathy, her class whined too much about some situations:

> Some people whine about putdowns by teachers. Our teacher does it to everybody and some can take it better than others. [Our teacher] doesn't do it purposefully to make them feel bad. [Our teacher] doesn't mean to make them feel bad but sometimes... goes over the line and they do feel bad. [Our teacher] then apologizes; [our teacher's] not perfect either. I know that if [our teacher] makes fun of me [our teacher] is doing it to make the class laugh and I don't take it bad, but the person next to me could over react. I know [our teacher] is joking. These are humorous put downs that sometimes hurt people. [Our teacher] does humour to get people to enjoy the class. I think my class whines too much about this.

Cathy went on to give an example about one girl who had a big mouth to a teacher, after the teacher had asked her to do something. The teacher sent her to the office and then went to talk to her. Later this teacher walked away with another teacher and was laughing. The girl who got in trouble thought the teacher was laughing at her. She went back to the class and wrote a note to the teacher on the blackboard saying how that upset her. The teacher didn't see the note until after the class was in the school and had read it on a Monday morning. Cathy claimed this event happened just before the surveys were given. As a class, they talked about the incident and this talk happened just after the surveys were completed. She thinks this incident may have influenced student responses on the survey to say that teachers give put-downs. At this point, Cathy said,

> I think now that the class would see things differently. Most of them would realize that this is different than they think. People would probably respond differently to the surveys now. I think most of the students would have changed their minds, if they wrote it on the survey. Now we have a different point of view of what happened.

ECS has contributed to helping Cathy develop a personal relationship with God. She told of a time when she put in to practice her learning about God:

> In one Bible exam at the end of the year, we were asked to give an example to show how we have grown spiritually this year? There was one time that we were all bugging a kid in our class and he started swearing at us. He got in trouble. I had to go to my locker and he was standing in the hallway beside my locker. When I went to my locker I had this feeling in me that I had to say sorry to him. That came from what I had learned in Bible class. Bible class stuff really applies to our lives… Somebody might have a devotion about 'What would Jesus do?' (WWJD) and you think about it throughout the day. It makes you stop and think again, WWJD. I play on a lot of community sports teams. I have a lot of friends who believe the same as me but I also have other friends. We don't always agree, but that's okay.

In considering how to make ECS a better place of Christian education, Cathy was adamant that teachers needed to be Christian and able to do the best job they could. They needed to be hired to teach "the Christian way." New students should be open to school beliefs and not just there to escape behaviour problems in another school, "We have some problem students and that is harder for the students around them. The teacher spends more time with them. It is harder because when the teacher is often disciplining them they might not be able to explain things to you."

As a word of information, Cathy wanted everyone to know how important the sports program was at school:

> I am really involved in the sports program. We need to keep this program. It is an outreach to other schools. If we play other schools, even if we're small, they see we are not so bad. They get to know who we are – that Christian school. That

> is good; we're not that bad after all. Without our sports teams other schools might not know about us. Sport is very important and we can't lose that.

For example, Cathy said, "I was talking to a student from another school. The other student asked, 'What school do you go to?' I told her and she said, 'Oh, your school beat us in basketball…' They remember our school."

Researcher's Reflections on the Interview

I had no prior personal knowledge of Cathy before the interview. I recognized her family name as a long-standing name in the CRC community and in the ECS community. Other than that, I knew nothing about her.

Cathy seemed to be a quietly confident person who wanted to make a difference. She was quite clear about her faith in God and her love for the school. She seemed to be a positive person, always looking for the good in things or seeing the brighter side of the picture. In some ways, this was my most difficult interview. I found that Cathy needed more prompting to say more. It became more of a conversation than an interview, but she provided good examples. When encouraged, she had lots to say.

She was the youngest person interviewed. I suspect that she was a more than competent grade 8 student and yet she could not talk as fluently about her beliefs. At this point, I realized grade 8 was probably the lowest grade to survey and interview. Below this level, it would become much more difficult to gather verbal or survey information. The process of thought and reflection was not as clear.

However, Cathy was able to answer some questions I had flagged in her survey. She was able to clarify why there had been so many comments about a particular teacher using "put-downs towards students." During the analysis of the student survey, the majority of one particular class had commented about teachers giving too many put-downs and disrespecting students. Cathy believed her class "whines too much about that." She gave clear examples of several things that happened and suggested that her classmates had been unable to see things from another point of view and had, actually, misinterpreted the situation. Certain situations had occurred in the class that probably led to those comments. It seemed that her survey was completed in the midst of these events and so the immediate feelings of the students were presented, not their long term, overall impressions. Cathy suggested that, if her classmates were to do the survey again, now at the later date of the interview, things would be different. She suspected that the put-down comment would be far less obvious. She believed that resolution had come to those situations and that students would see things differently now. I felt this was very observant of her. She filled in some missing gaps for me.

My interview with Cathy reminded me, again, that surveys are only one form of data collection. It reinforced my belief that any questionnaire or survey is completed based on the respondents' feelings at that immediate time, even if those feelings are not predominant most of the time. For this reason, it was extremely important to have a triangulation of data at different times, to avoid a reflex response that is then assumed to be normative.

Here was a good example, where a specific comment based on a certain situation is not typical of life in this classroom but has predominance for a while. If someone were to judge the whole school or this particular teacher on this survey and comment, it would ultimately be an unfair assessment. That is not to say, however, that un-Christian things do not happen. Even in a Christian school these negative things happen, as Cathy said because, "Even Christian teachers cannot be perfect."

All in all, these interviews allowed me to probe more deeply into some issues raised in the survey data. These inspiring personal stories, experiences and opinions of parents, teachers and students connected to Edmonton Christian School, gave substance to various themes that emerged. My attempts to understand and interpret these revelations, in the light of my own experience within this community, were meaningful. Hopefully, these results will be constructive in moving this school community toward a better practice of Christian education. From the questionnaire, rating scale survey and interviews, global themes emerged. The identification and interpretation of these specific themes was important to reflect on what makes Edmonton Christian School a Christian school. These themes and patterns are explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

In this chapter I take a close look at my overall results. I pull together the findings and personally reflect on the process of the study, considering the final results and discussing various issues that have arisen. I attempt to express my personal thoughts concerning this study, indicating what I have learned and considering what these results mean for my practice of Christian education. Ultimately, my study focused on a Christian perspective, Christian teachers, a Christian environment and academics within a Christian School. As a result of the qualitative and quantitative data received from parents, teachers and students, I have added reflections about the structure and administration of Edmonton Christian School (ECS). These five categories made up the bulk of the comments that suggested features that make Edmonton Christian School a Christian school.

Reflections on the Study

Throughout many years of teaching in a Christian school, I often wondered, 'What makes this place a Christian school?' What makes it different from the school next door? And, does Christian education mean the same thing for all participants? I was convinced that this study would be valuable for at least two reasons. Personally, it would be an avenue by which I could explore my own thoughts on Christian education. I believed that the findings might provide me with a greater understanding of my own journey and help me more successfully transfer my beliefs toward a better practice of Christian education. Second, my goal was to provide practical detailed information to Edmonton Christian School community members concerning what makes ECS a Christian school. Ultimately, I hoped the research findings would help me articulate Christian education at ECS so that I could cogently share with fellow Christian educators and Christian community participants' ideas for improving Christian education.

Mostly, through collection of survey data in the form of a questionnaire and rating scale and the compilation of interview themes, I amassed a great deal of information. Over 650 parents, teachers and students were surveyed and approximately 400 people responded. Participants described their experiences with their faith and Edmonton Christian School.

Analyzing the surveys, especially the qualitative, short answer questionnaire, was more of a challenge than I initially expected. The data clearly reached a saturation point when themes and patterns became obvious in the questionnaire; comments became repetitive and some statements provided clarification of other comments. It was easier to identify themes in positive categories such as "What features make ECS a Christian school?" More difficulty occurred in the labeling of the negative categories such as "What are hindrances to Christian education at ECS?" It seemed, also, that the negative comments required much more explanation.

Based on the number of themes identified or the number of words written, it initially appears that the negative evaluation outweighs the positive; but, on a closer look, that is not a true reflection. The need to explain negative information seems more imperative than the need to elaborate on positive circumstances. With the stories and deeper descriptions given, it was easier to begin to picture what makes ECS a Christian school. Within this larger picture many smaller pictures began to gain varying degrees of clarity, thereby bringing the larger picture into greater focus.

A Christian worldview is indeed an individual or family perspective. To specific questions, some people stated "no concerns" and some listed many suggestions for improvement. Some people had stories that evidenced personal hurt acquired within this Christian school environment while others maintained a positive, passionate desire for Christian education. I can't help but wonder at the depth of self-reflection, or lack of it, in some responses. A few people were brutally honest and critical of their own Christian practice while others did not seem to engage the issues at all; some of this could be due to lack of self-reflection or self-awareness, not enough time to complete the survey in detail or no desire to share with the researcher. I am amazed at what I perceived as great honesty in most participants. I can't help but admire those whose passion for Christian education was clearly evident; they simply cared deeply about what happens with Christian education at ECS.

The quantifiable data produced results that more quickly identified patterns or themes. A percentage and the number of people actually responding to that item identified the frequency of a pattern. These simple values may appear very limiting; they do little to help interpret or understand what people actually mean by their responses. And, although a greater statistical analysis may have been plausible in some contexts, the purpose of this research was to engage a particular audience, the community of ECS and possibly other Christian education school communities. This purpose did not warrant greater statistical detail. Determining a percentage from patterns identified and indicating the number of people that responded, was helpful for my purposes. In research involving a triangulation of data and interpretations, I believe the subsequent results are reliable and representative of the community at ECS. Many articulate voices were heard. I am affirmed that the rating scale designations I chose were accurate: faith, community, teachers and academics. On hindsight, one more category might have been added to the survey that dealt with the topic of school governance. Comments about the ECS structure and politics kept re-appearing from time to time.

Early in the analysis and interpretation stage, I faced a second challenge. I began to react emotionally and personally to the responses. Being familiar with staff, students, parents, and extended community members, it was often hard to read critiques even when they were said carefully. Sometimes anonymous surveys were not so anonymous; I believed I knew whom the person was talking about. In reading some situations, I found myself thinking: Did I ever do that?

Eventually, when I came to perusing surveys of parents whose children attended junior high, I found myself having "Oh! Oh!" thoughts. What are these parents going to say about this level, one in which I personally have a vested interest, having taught there for the past four years. These critiques were hard to hear. Some were specific examples and the negotiator/conflict resolution side of me wondered: Did they talk to someone about this issue? Was it resolved? Do the teachers even know? Are parents staying quiet? It should be "dealt with." Were proper procedures followed?

At various times, I asked all these questions because I knew what the ECS policy said. I know what we say in our staff meetings; we want to deal with these issues. But, does each teacher and staff member follow up completely on issues encountered. Being human and all -- I doubt it, obviously not. Nevertheless, I remained impressed that so many who spoke openly and freely in their survey still signed their names to indicate their willingness to be interviewed as well. I felt humbled at the trust placed in me by individuals that expressed so much, with deep conviction.

Personally, the most beneficial and informative part of the research was to interview nine people. I was struck by the diversity of experiences and backgrounds. I hoped to interview a cross-section of people in the community -- parents, teachers and students. I didn't realize just how diverse my pre-chosen sample was until the individuals identified their perspective and experiences. I was again reminded that the perspective of each person is based on experience and past history; no one can truly think objectively. We are all bound within our own life situation.

Listening to people's stories was stimulating and draining. I expected to engage each interviewee for about one-half hour; all of the interviews took longer than I expected and two interviews were over an hour. Two males claimed they didn't think they had much more to say, but they did. For one person the session seemed almost like therapy, a time to release pent-up feelings and stress. Four interviews had some very emotional moments when the interviewees were caught up in the passion and memories of the moment; eyes flooded with tears and voices trembled. These were wonderful and sweet moments, to be privileged to see the depth and passion of the person and to know they were sharing from the heart. I had a glimpse into the person; I saw their fears and confidences, their pains and joys, their frustrations and their passions. I felt honoured to hear these stories. I was amazed and humbled and my respect for each participant's openness and honesty increased. Although I actually knew all these people, to greater and lesser degrees, I learned much about every person. Somehow, again, I grasped the importance of telling our story. At the end of the day, I realized I could have done a whole thesis just listening to people's stories. These stories were wonderful; thus, I gave a greater emphasis to these stories than I first intended.

Upon my final interpretation of the questionnaires, surveys and interviews, I collected and tabulated the results that were then presented to a focus group. The focus group participants included board members, parents, administrators and teachers at Edmonton Christian School. All participants were given a summary of the results before the gathering and were asked to reflect upon some guide questions. It was my intent to dialogue with them concerning their interpretations of my findings and to hear their questions and concerns.

The focus group discussion did not turn out the way I expected. I received little feedback in terms of new ideas or thoughts that I should consider in my research and analysis. Instead, they wanted to hear my views, more about my research and my thoughts about where Christian education should and could go at Edmonton Christian School. I was prepared, if necessary, to read sections of my research analysis and my interpretations. It was unanimous that my results seemed accurate according to their experiences and feelings. They simply wanted me to share with them and read my research to them; this I did. Occasionally there was some discussion, but always in consensus with my findings and ideas.

Initially I found the focus group responses disappointing. Instead of gathering additional feedback and suggestions for more reflective thought, I was asked to provide answers. Although I had some specific questions, the focus group members were much more intent on hearing my research results and interpretations. Later, I realized that in the opinion of the focus group participants my research was quite thorough, the findings clearly portrayed and the results very accurate. My interpretations were consistent with their understandings and perceptions of the community, a true reflection of how they believed parents, teachers and students perceived Edmonton Christian School as a Christian school.

It was at this point that I also wondered if a hierarchical structure of trust and a sense of position or place had been established; did these interfere with the acquisition of more information? By my presence and work in this school, I earned a good reputation. Then, because of my level of education and research work toward a doctorate degree, could there be a sense of awe -- the feeling among the focus group members that they could not contradict what I, an educated, competent person, had found and interpreted as the results.

Nevertheless, I do not really believe that my "position" as it relates to my education or my profession could cause such poor dialogue; the focus group members were composed of a variety of educated professionals, none of whom seem likely to be easily intimidated. After puzzling over these results, I decided that all of the above are likely true to some extent; however, the focus group members convinced me and I settled with the basic understanding that they simply believed the results were indeed accurate and very applicable to Edmonton Christian School. When my research is complete, they want to hear more and set in place mechanisms to work on the features that were identified in the study as factors that hinder the effectiveness of Christian education at the school. Perhaps at another time, with a greater emphasis on goal setting toward an improvement of Christian education, there may be deeper discussions and the feedback that I sought in this focus group.

At a future date it would be interesting to go beyond the scope of this study to compare these results with those of other educational researchers. It would also be valuable to survey and interview community supporters who are no longer teachers, parents or students at ECS. And, it would be interesting to conduct similar surveys within other Christian school environments, whose populations encompass a wider or different ethnic, cultural or religious worldview.

Finally, upon the completion of my research, I realized that three major categories emerged that defined ECS as a Christian school:

(1) the faith integration of the Christian worldview into all of education and life,

(2) the importance of relationships in the Christian community, and

(3) the Christian educators who strive to pull all this together in the achieving of Christian education.

Nevertheless, the recognition of academics and the overall governance structure of the school are factors that contribute to an important description of ECS; these were perceived as important factors on a much smaller scale. The data collected is relevant for current discussion. As with all things, this information and the perceptions of parents, teachers and students will change and evolve as new events and situations are encountered. For now, all I do is report these findings and consider my own understandings that, also, will change and evolve over time. This is all a part of the journey toward a better practice of Christian education.

Reflections on the Research Results and Issues

In this section, I attempt to interpret and reflect on my understanding of what makes ECS a Christian school. Interpretations are simply based on my findings collected from surveying parents, teachers and students and on data gathered in the interviews. My personal experience and on-going development of my own Christian worldview underlie and influence my reflections on "What makes ECS a Christian school?"

Three major themes will be assessed in more detail: faith integration, community relationships and teachers as Christian educators. Reference will also be made to academics and the governance and structure of ECS. These notations are limited to these specific categories, for obvious reasons of space and time. However, it is noteworthy that more questions arose and many more inherent research possibilities emerged from the data and subsequent discussions.

In the process of analyzing and interpreting the surveys and interviews I believe an interesting and clear overall pattern developed. Respondents with children in the primary grades seemed more satisfied with the Christian education that they perceived their children experience. Participants whose children were in the higher grades began to express more concerns. Parents of intermediate students talked more about behaviour and relationship concerns; nevertheless, these parents were ultimately satisfied while recognizing the challenges facing their children. At the junior high and senior high level, parents expressed the greatest difficulties about Christian education. Sometimes teachers were viewed as inadequate, while other school families were blamed for the bad language, bullying behaviour and lack of spirituality that parents perceived as present at this level. A few parents even went so far as to say that the senior high campus had very little that is identifiable as Christian, except in name only.

This general trend, to notice the greater difficulties in Christian education according to the increased age of the students, made me wonder not just about the delivery of Christian education at the different levels but about the impact of child development as it causes changes in the student from level to level. Maybe the perceived lack of respect in the older students is not a criticism only of Christian education but a fundamental reality for teenagers in our world today. Bibby & Posterski (1992) have much to say about the nature of teenagers; without a doubt the needs of the students are different at each level of development. Clearly this means, also, that the nature of Christian education needs to consider the various levels of child development to best accommodate the needs of young people as they grow in their faith and learn to live in God's world.

Faith Integration at Edmonton Christian School

Articulated in the Vision (Appendix B) and Mission (Appendix A) Statements of Edmonton Christian School is the claim that education in this school is distinctive. Christian education in this school means to teach from a Christian perspective, integrating this worldview into all of life and learning. It would appear from the results of the research that the majority of participants perceived that Christian faith integration with learning truly is a distinguishing feature of ECS. Over and over, participants declared that ECS strives to integrate the Christian perspective into education. This was the foundational reason for most students attending the school and the strongest feature recognizing ECS as a Christian school.

In completing the surveys, many participants of Christian Reformed Church (CRC) background used traditional, Christian perspective language to respond to the questions. Clearly, they know the talk and have the language of their faith figured out, but what does it really mean? It was easier to understand the responses of people who explained what they meant when they talked about "the integration of the Christian perspective" into education. Personally, as a Christian educator, I'd rather have someone stumble on their words but know with passion their purpose for sending their kids to a Christian school, than to speak eloquently the rhetoric in dispassionate language. I suspect that some respondents, using traditional language, understood it and meant it; a few, I propose, knew the rhetoric but not the depth of its meaning. They did not appear to have a personal passion for Christian education. Still others, who used the rhetoric to describe ECS as a place with a "good Christian perspective," seemed to say or explain little. I can't help but consider the comment by one respondent who believed that many people connected to ECS "can talk the talk; they know the rhetoric, but they seem unenthused about their faith."

One response to the Christian integration of faith, into learning for life, was for the students to develop a personal relationship with God. The recognition of what it means to have a personal relationship with God was as diverse as the number of people having this relationship. Some community members felt that ECS does a good job encouraging this growth while others believed it needs more emphasis. This emphasis ultimately depends upon one's point of view. Some parents felt that the primary, and maybe only, reason for the Christian school is for the integration of the Christian perspective into education; the development of a personal faith is not the task of the school. Other respondents believed this secondary task was equally important to the integration of the Christian perspective in education. And, some parents prioritized the two with faith integration being the primary goal and personal faith development being a secondary goal of Christian education. These positions, sometimes, seemed to indicate different worldviews.

One student contemplated this issue, speculating on the difference between the integration of the Christian faith into life and learning and having a personal relationship with God. I believe she summed up the situation accurately when she said, "God-learning is what Christian education is all about." This is the practice of integrating the Christian perspective into all of life. It means teaching about the Christian faith and learning to practice it in life. The data collected suggest that ECS does a good job of this, by most everyone's estimation. This student continued to say: "With our Christian tradition, we have well thought out ideas of the BIG PICTURE -- that God is Lord of all of life." However, she goes on to discuss the second aspect of a Christian faith, a personal relationship with God. It is at this point that she suggests, "We (ECS) often miss or are weak in the 'personal work with Christ' side of the picture. We become very routine and comfortable in our schools, and lose our sense of urgency and dependence on God."

A parent commented that many people within the CRC community "are not really comfortable with appearing to be too Christian. We don't express faith freely and I think this affects how our children respond and in turn affects the school." This seemed to be a reference to a personal expression of faith. When one talks about a "personal relationship with God" one is usually referring not only to a private, intimate relationship with God but to a more visible and usually obvious God-talk and God-actions. Open praise and worship through music and song are visible signs of a "personal relationship with God." The individual often expresses their belief verbally. It may appear more vibrant, a very real part of the person. To this end, many CRC people often hesitate to be so overt; their personal faith and God-actions may appear subtle; thus, others may view them as being less passionate. In this regard, some parents felt that the students at ECS

> are not encouraged or forced to stand up for their faith. Nor do they have to make a commitment to God and develop a personal relationship with Him. Some will do this anyway, but others may not even consider that there is a need for a living, personal relationship with God.

Besides defining what one means by a personal relationship with God, is the question as to how a student develops this relationship. Some view this as a particular act, a point in time where a conscious decision is made to follow God. Others consider this relationship to be a process whereby one grows into a commitment to God. Both views have implications for how Christian teachers encourage or lead students in this direction. Many factors are dependent on the student and teachers' views about what it means to have a personal relationship with God.

To me, Christian education is about integrating faith with learning and about developing a personal faith and relationship with God. Both goals are important for Christian education; they are not exclusive, just prioritized. I suggest that, because school is about the business of education, the focus of Christian education within the school context is to integrate the Christian perspective into education and life. However, I hope that this integration is not just academic knowledge but becomes personal, resulting in a relationship with the very God whom we claim is Lord of all life and learning. The knowledge part is easier to teach, but the living out of the faith, making it personal, is obviously an individual decision and a daily process. The faith journey of every person is different; the level of maturity in each student needs to be considered. Nevertheless, the development of a personal response and faith commitment should be encouraged and even nurtured within the Christian school context.

One participant commented on the many changes that have taken place in the last 20 years. The definition of the Christian Reformed faith and life is felt to be much broader, much wider in tolerance and expression of faith and piety, "There is a broader expression of faith, a faith of all flavours! The continuum between differing worldviews is believed to be narrowing. For youth the lines between denominations are more blurred than they used to be." Youth conferences that allow youth to share their faith together unite many different perspectives and share common experiences. Both ends need to move together for a person to have the "whole package." This respondent continued to elaborate that, in talking and interviewing youth for profession of faith some students will talk a lot about a "personal relationship with God." These tend not to be the CRC youth. However, CRC youth will talk about living in a faith community. Both have something to contribute to the other. This participant concluded that we should live in community and have a personal relationship with God; they are not exclusive.

As a Christian educator, I believe students are just beginning their faith journey. If they cannot express what I or other parents hope to hear, that is fine. They are all at different stages, in the process of learning about life and finding what it means to have a relationship with the Creator. The respondents to my research were asked to share their perspective on Christian education at ECS. They have done just that in personal and individual ways. At this point on their faith journey, they expressed their current perspective. Even if this perspective sounds too much like a cliché; that's their expression. However, I would hope that these same people would seek to think and appropriate their faith as their own, expressing it in a way that indicates a personal reflection and heart knowledge, also. To stop at just knowing about the Christian faith is not the same as personalizing the Christian faith. Without a doubt, I believe all supporters of Christian education hope their children will some day make a personal commitment to God. Ultimately, Christian education is about learning how to live and be a Christian; this is personal.

I think of one young child's expression of faith, as recorded by his mother, "I am a God admirer!" To express our knowing is a complex affair. Bruner (1982) advocates that educators not be afraid to bring real-life situations into the classroom for discussion. In this regard, "classic human predicaments make superb case material for discussion in classroom at practically any age. It is, after all, what life is all about" (p. 62). To show and live our lives as Christians -- being Christ-like in the everyday events and struggles of our life -- is a constant challenge. Probably our actions are a more accurate portrayal of what we really know.

Community and Relationships at Edmonton Christian School

Learning to live as a Christian and as a contributing member of a community is a fundamental aspect of Christian education. This task is often difficult and always a challenge. The teaching and modelling of the Christian perspective is highlighted in the mission and vision statements. My research indicated that this teaching was the primary reason why parents send their children to the Christian school and that the integration of the Christian faith with curriculum was the major feature that makes ECS a Christian school.

Without a doubt, the members of ECS have the right words. Their common faith was a real strength recognized by almost every respondent; they articulate the vision and mission and incorporate and integrate the Christian perspective into education. Members in this community wonderfully talk the talk. Many survey responses were similar in expressing the rhetoric of Christian education; that is not a criticism of the clear definition of Christian education and the Reformed tradition whose members have faithfully articulated and re-articulated their faith from generation to generation. I do believe that most respondents believed with all their hearts the words they said and wrote.

However, I do not for a moment believe all these families and teachers are involved in Christian education just so that children may understand a Christian viewpoint or be able to explain a Christian worldview. As evidenced in this study, many participants commented on the importance of community. Living in community is what life is about. As Christians, they engage in Christian education so that their children understand a Christian perspective and learn to live as a Christian. Education with a Christian perspective is learning to live life where God is central to all of life and life is about community and relationships. To this community, the underlying, fundamentally most important reason for Christian education is that students will learn to live in relationship with each other, in community, and that they will develop a relationship with their Creator.

Initially, the emphasis on living as a Christian did not seem to me to be the primary goal of participants in my study. In research done by Hoeksema (1991), clearly his respondents believed the strength of the Christian school experience was the community; a positive and healthy community received top marks for what was a major focus in Christian education. My research results on ECS would seem to indicate that the words and intentional delivery of a Christian worldview is the primary focus. However, these statements or goals need not be exclusive. The many comments by participants in my study about features that hinder Christian education at ECS, suggest that community living is, also, vitally important. I can't help but wonder at the discrepancy between this community's ability to live the faith in as clear a manner as the talk they produce. It is easy to talk; it is much harder to act in the manner stated. Living, acting and being a Christian is much more difficult than just talking about it. And, it would seem, living and working in a school environment presents numerous challenges associated with the specialized nature of this institution.

School is a unique place. There is no other place quite like it with a similar visible and physical environment. Jackson (1968) describes this unusual context where children are in school for a long time, in settings where their performance is highly uniform; they are there whether they want to be or not (p. 30). In further analysis,

> aside from sleeping, and perhaps playing, there is no other activity that occupies as much of the child's time as that involved in attending school. Apart from the bedroom (where he has his eyes closed most of the time) there is no single enclosure in which he spends a longer time than he does in the classroom. From the age of six onward he is a more familiar sight to his teacher than to his father, and possibly even to his mother. (p. 30)

To understand the significance of the amount of time a child spends at school, Jackson (1968) compares the child's time spent in school to church attendance, "In order to have had as much time in church as a sixth grader has had in classrooms we would have to spend all day at a religious gathering every Sunday for more than 24 years" or "attend a one-hour service every Sunday for 150 years (p. 31). For a twelve-year old student, this is an amazing amount of time to have already spent in the school environment.

Thus, it could be said that schools have become relatively familiar and stable physical environments for children. According to Jackson (1968) the school provides "a fairly constant social context" (p. 32). For many students this may be a good thing, but for some it may not. Social intimacy at school would seem to be unmatched in any other context. Jackson asserts that, "only in schools do thirty or more people spend several hours each day literally side by side" (p. 33). Undoubtedly, the environment of a school is socially demanding. At the same time as the physical confinement, the child must learn to adhere to certain consistent structures. Major activities are "performed according to rather well-defined rules which the students are expected to understand and obey" (p. 33).

Not only is the child confined to this orderly and populated environment for considerable lengths of time, but also each child must learn to deal with specific characteristics of school life. Jackson (1968) announces that within high population environments, such as in a school classroom, the elements of praise, reproof and power are significant. These three dominant factors are all part of the hidden curriculum in schools. Within a classroom the teacher and other students exercise various forms of power and dominance. At the same time praise and reproof are personal and public labels given to students. Jackson believes, "Learning to live in a classroom involves… learning to live in a crowd" (p. 30). Equally distressing may be the fact that a child's words and deeds are constantly evaluated by others; this evaluation either leads to praise or reproof.

Ultimately the teacher, not the child, controls and shapes the events and atmosphere of the classroom. Within this milieu, each child learns adaptive strategies for dealing with people. These coping mechanisms are usually transferred to other parts of their life and we call this learning to live in community. Under these circumstances, no wonder parents and educators contend that the years spent in school mark all of us. Within this context, each student in a Christian school is not only educated about God but also encouraged to live their faith with others in community.

Recognizing that the school environment is unique, it is little wonder that communal living is the most difficult aspect of Christian education. Survey results indicated several re-occurring themes that show how challenging it is to live our intentions. Teachers, parents, and students recognized that the greatest concern was the lack of respect for others. At times, this disrespect took the form of bullying, belittling, teasing or intentionally putting down another person. One respondent indicated that some aspects of humour and teasing may be cultural traits, "As part of the Dutch community there are put-downs." Since a majority of this school environment remains of Dutch heritage, one must ask how this Dutch humour and teasing is negative? How do we define too much teasing? If in fact it is negative, should one go about changing this cultural trait and how does one go about changing this? How aware are people that the humour they use can be seen as a form of put-down, especially in the area of teasing? One respondent indicated that at certain Dutch functions, "there tends to be more bathroom humour, about gross things." To some people this would appear coarse, an indication of a "roughness." Is some of this "disrespect" simply cultural ways of being together?

The issue of a cultural or Christian ethos is an interesting one in this context. Many members of this Christian school community find their cultural and religious traditions within the Dutch Calvinist community. These early immigrants founded distinctive schools and other Christian organizations and, in some ways, remained a distinctive sub-community for many years. A study of the literature concerning the relationship between culture and faith, although beyond the scope of this research, would be an interesting endeavour.

Parents have identified the atmosphere of the community at ECS as being important because it is a religious community, passing on the Christian perspective. But, could this community have value because parents are comfortable with a Dutch ethnic context? Are we talking about a religious culture or an ethnic culture that is prevalent and valued at ECS? Is the long-term tenure of the teachers explained by the realization that many of them are also of this same cultural and religious background?

It is interesting to note that the number of students identified, as actively reflecting "Christian values in their character and behaviour," is relatively low for a Christian school. Parents and teachers seem to recognize there might be a problem here. Could the desirable environment at ECS, identified as Christian, really be more a cultural community based on tradition? Would these considerations explain some of the struggle to integrate other Christians whose culture and Christian views are not so easily compatible with the Dutch Calvinist community?

Some behaviour, accepted in the Dutch culture, may be offensive to other Christian people or viewed as crude. Defining "crude" is different for other people and cultures. The Dutch people may not see as crude what others would see as crude. The word "shit" used in many families might not be defined as crude; it is a part of their vocabulary. They might wonder, "What are you talking about? That is not crude." To distinguish between acceptable cultural behaviours and acceptable Christian behaviours becomes more challenging. Ultimately, humour tends to be a point of concern; teasing may occur that is perceived as negative but that is intended to be play. "Just kidding" is a common student comment in response to a situation where teasing has occurred; sometimes the individual doing the teasing recognizes that the recipient of "the joke" is not so sure about the intent. Therefore, this reassurance, "just kidding," is uttered to supposedly relieve the recipient and assure the person that the intent of the comment is not negative; this process is likely modelled from students around them and from the family at home. One person suggested, "Maybe teasing is a way to show affection because they (Dutch people) do not have the same openness as some other cultures." Again, we have a possible cultural trait. This lack of open expression was also proposed by some as a reason why CRC people tend not to be as vibrant, or openly expressive, in the manifestation of their faith.

However, these considerations should in no way negate the survey comments about disrespect. It only makes defining of disrespect more challenging. What some parents and teachers may overlook as natural, another parent or teacher would find quite offensive. It is important to note that most people responding to the research were of Dutch heritage and many expressed concerns over disrespect. Simply suggesting that teasing and disrespect can be labelled as a cultural trait, is not enough to excuse it, to explain it or to change it. Although one may consider that the practices of a culture are inherent in some situations, there are still many occasions that are offensive, even to the Dutch, Christian people. And, many recognize their own foibles and want to see change.

Disrespect and other inadequate behaviour affecting communal living were experienced and expressed by parents, teachers and students. Some concerns included disrespect for property, élitism and cliques, poor communication, selfishness, intolerance, inconsistencies, and gossip. As one teacher said, "We are good at talking the talk. How are we at walking the walk? Not just at doing service projects and reaching out in the community, but at living in our own daily environment." The community emphasis on living as Christians is vitally important; they are still in progress toward achieving this. Whether it is in the area of communication, conflict resolution or simply working together, community members need to struggle to walk the talk; others will know they are Christians when they see and feel their love.

Christians are admonished to follow in the example of Christ. Christians know this and members of this community can speak the rhetoric, but doing it is another story. The New Testament is full of admonitions from the apostles to the Christians in the various churches who talk about knowing the rhetoric and the vision but the difficulty of doing it. Why should this community be different? From staff-staff relationships to staff-administration relationships to parent-teacher relationships to student-student relationships to student-teacher relationships, all members have to work on establishing more healthy Christian relationships. There is a fear of outside influences presently defined as EPS. But, I wonder if the greatest threat is not from within, our own prejudices, inconsistencies and failure to live, as we know we should.

The strength of Christian education at ECS seems to be a common goal, the working toward a Christian education as mandated in the mission and vision statements. Clearly, the desire to teach and live Christianly is present; living the faith is a daily, communal and individual struggle. The communal living out of this faith seems to be the greatest challenge.

Christian Teachers at Edmonton Christian School

Christian education implies that someone is responsible for the education. These educators must willingly and even passionately embrace a Christian worldview. Much has been said about the strength of ECS being the integration of a Christian perspective into education and life. This can only be accomplished when Christian educators strive to fulfill the mission and vision of ECS. Bruner (1960) acknowledges that teachers are "the principal agents of instruction" (p.15). All the words and all the talk will mean nothing unless someone puts words into actions. This action is taken and assumed, predominantly, by teachers.

Teachers at ECS were rated very high as being friendly, caring people. This statement had strong agreement from many parents and teachers. These qualities of a Christian teacher seem obvious, but many other educators also fit this requirement. Tied for first place in the parent ratings with teacher friendliness was faith integration, the perception that students receive a clear teaching about God and their responsibility as God's people. Christian educators are not only friendly, caring people but promote, teach and strive to model a Christian perspective to the students; students identified teachers as excellent role models of the Christian faith. All survey participants recognized the important role of Christian teachers; they are vital in the integration of the Christian faith with the curriculum and in modelling the Christian life to the students.

Likewise, a high percentage of teachers perceived that students at ECS receive strong Christian teaching that integrates life and learning. This statement was the highest rated in the survey. It was also the most important reason why Christian teachers continued to teach at ECS. Their passion for Christian education keeps them faithful to this school and to this community as they strive to fulfill not only the task to educate students but to educate students within a Christian perspective.

However, one must wonder if this passion for Christian education is not greatly influenced by the cultural closeness that is part of many teachers' traditions. Will this passion for Christian education at ECS be less obvious in years to come when teachers may have less of a cultural connection to the Dutch heritage and less contact with the Christian Reformed Church? Again, one ponders the relationship between faith and culture as evidenced in the ECS community. The culture and faith of the teachers will, undoubtedly, continue to impact the atmosphere at ECS.

One particular teacher, having taught at various levels, spoke about her perceptions of teaching at the different divisions. She claimed that each level requires a specific focus in terms of Christian perspective:

> Division one is preparation work for the moulding that can occur later. Teaching division two was the most satisfying in terms of teaching Biblical and Christian values because students are ready to make informed choices. You can really mould them at this age. Division three, on the other hand, is damage control, when the mould doesn't hold.

Regardless of a teacher's personal perception, each grade level and even each individual requires a unique approach. Educators need to be aware of the developmental stages of student growth and encourage and motivate students within these normative stages. Christian educators also need to consider the developmental stages of spiritual growth and encourage and nurture students toward a Christian faith.

The aspect of faith integration that appeared somewhat weak was dealing with brokenness in the community. Reflected mostly in the relationships between people, it was perceived that the way staff and community members confront and work toward changing inappropriate behaviours and attitudes needs more discussion. The question of law versus grace often arose and this issue is an on-going discussion for teachers who try to model Christ. What does it mean to discipline effectively? How does one lead toward healing and what if the bad behaviour persists? Having rejected the behaviour, when does one remove or reject the person? Staff members grapple with these practical problems, realizing that they are also theological issues. As a Christian school purporting to educate and guide students into a right faith and action lifestyle, when, or do, we remove those who refuse to participate or do not even attempt to behave according to rules imposed, as appropriate for a Christian lifestyle.

Clearly, teachers had varying degrees of satisfaction with their experiences at ECS. Most expressed a passion for teaching while recognizing the immense stresses that accompany the challenge of talking about a Christian worldview and walking in a Christian lifestyle. Community expectations were seen as demanding and sometimes the political repercussions were overwhelming. According to several teachers, when things get too complicated, "teachers do what they can to just survive." For some, this survival mode means returning to "only classroom" mode; they stop focussing on the bigger picture and just teach within their own domain.

Possibly teacher unease is due to societal attitudes that seem to have invaded the educational domain in the last few decades, a devaluing and deskilling of teacher work. Giroux (1985) claims that "technocratic and instrumental rationalities are also at work within the teaching field itself, and they play an increasing role in reducing teacher autonomy with respect to the development and planning of curricula and the judging and implementation of classroom instruction" (p. 378). This becomes obvious in the abundance of "teacher-proof" curriculum where teachers are expected to simply carry out the pre-determined content and instructional procedures. These become "management pedagogies." The basic questions regarding learning are reduced to problem management -- allocating resources, teachers, students and materials -- to produce the greatest learning in a specified amount of time. Other experts do the thinking, while teachers implement.

According to Giroux, "the effect is not only to deskill teachers, to remove them from the process of deliberation and reflection, but also to routinize the nature of learning and classroom pedagogy" (p. 378). This management pedagogy, of course, ignores the unique characteristics of students who come from different backgrounds, belief systems, cultures, and possess different talents and languages. Likewise, the increased emphasis on standardization of evaluation fails to recognize and celebrate the whole child. Teachers practicing education within this context become little more than managers of an already prescribed, even dictated, curriculum.

Giroux (1985) proposes that teachers be viewed as "transformative intellectuals" (378). Within this capacity teachers are viewed as dignified human beings with the ability to integrate thinking and practice. To this end a teacher must take an active, responsible role in shaping the purpose and condition of schools. As reflective scholars and practitioners, teachers cannot assume a neutral position. They must take a stand to transfer the students into active, critical-thinking citizens. It is as a "transformative intellectual" that a Christian teacher must act. Within the framework of Christian education, a Christian teacher must engage the students in thinking and responding, giving students a voice and the opportunity to discover God's diverse world and their role in it.

Realizing the post-modern focus on teachers as managers of pedagogy and prescribed curriculum is, indeed, too limiting. Teachers, and especially Christian teachers, must critically interact with prescribed curriculum to determine its value and worth. Eisner (1990) is concerned about who makes the decisions about what schools should teach. He states, "No matter how well something is taught, if it's not worth teaching, it's not worth teaching well" (p. 524). He suggests that in some contexts there appears to be a neglect of broad aims and overall school programs in favour of improving presentation in a creative, stimulating environment. According to Eisner, "We appear to want better messengers more than better messages" (p. 524). This emphasis on teaching style rather than content and process of teaching is detrimental to education.

For the overall health of a Christian school, it seems vital that Christian teachers remain physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy so they can effectively engage the prescribed curriculum and present meaningful real-life learning and experiences to students. To constantly deal with the emotional, social and spiritual health of the students, and often parents, these stresses can, at times, become burdensome. Teachers, too, need nurturing. At ECS, some teachers suggested that this aspect of the Christian community was minimal. The teaching staffs have faced huge transitions: joining of EPS, the Christian school structural changes, and administrative changes. Some survey responses seemed to indicate that teachers need to work more at being perfect. Several students made profound statements that would be best repeated throughout the community. Since we are all human, "teachers are allowed to make mistakes." And, when they do, that is okay; it is just another part of the community working toward a better understanding of what it means to be a Christian school and toward providing a Christian education.

Ultimately, the teachers were viewed as a tremendous asset to Christian education at ECS. They remain a vital part of the Christian community. Not only do they teach students and integrate the Christian perspective into learning and life, but also they share and discover their own faith journey as they attempt to model a Christian lifestyle for the students. This is not an easy task, to walk the talk at all times.

Governance and Structure at Edmonton Christian School

An area that I did not identify as a theme on the rating scale survey, but that was identified as an important feature affecting Christian education was the governance and structure that makes up ECS. A number of parents, teachers and students expressed concerns about the operations of ECS, especially in the area of administration and as an alternative school in Edmonton Public School (EPS). Fear of change and fear of the unknown made many people question the future. The fundamental, underlying concern regarding the politics of ECS was the desire to maintain a Christian perspective with Christian educators providing this Christian perspective.

For the staff at ECS there seemed to be an increased sense of over work. Lack of time, busyness and lack of resources to effectively do the job they felt called to do has created tremendous pressures. Whether this ranged from too much paper work perceived as a function of now belonging to EPS or whether it was a busyness demanded with high expectations from the community and administration regarding what is required for a standard of excellence in achievement, or whether there are expectations to work more closely with colleagues in order to confirm that we are one school (a position emphasized a great deal lately), it is fair to say that teachers seem to be very busy. The sense that self-care may be lacking was perceived as a concern by some teachers; self-care for one's self, for family members and for colleagues at work. The demands seemed to be increasing and there was simply not enough time.

ECS has been changing, even before the community became an alternative school. Changes in our society, changes in the traditional churches and changes in families and individuals have affected the Christian school. Without a doubt ECS is seriously linked to specific Christian churches and certain Christian families; that is both an advantage at times and a disadvantage at other times. There is the desire to stand firm and educate even more firmly within a Christian perspective. Some of this perspective is bound up in the community that is foundationally Christian Reformed. Although the hope is that other denominations and church people will join ECS, the reality is that there remains a strong Dutch and Reformed tradition. Some people fear opening the doors to other Christian people. They fear losing their Christian heritage grounded within the Reformed traditions. However, other research participants encouraged the inclusion of others; they felt that embracing other Christian traditions would be a benefit to ECS. Some of the elitism, intolerance and cliquish behaviours are attributable to the members being familiar and steeped in their own traditions. Change means listening to other Christian worldviews. Change is not easy; it can even be painful.

In many contexts not enough attention is paid to the over-riding structure of the school and the impact this has on all people within that learning environment. We live in a changing, post modern society. According to Hargreaves (1994) our society is in a constant state of flux; the education system, teachers and schools are caught in the current drama of activity. Because we live in a time of flexible economies, we need to educate young people "in skills and qualities like adaptability, responsibility, flexibility and the capacity to work with others" (p. 50). Globalization means a decrease in personal and national identities, but teachers must prepare students for global life and focus on the "resurgence of ethnic, religious and linguistic identities of a more localized nature" (p. 54).

A decline has occurred in the Judaeo-Christian tradition "as the prime purpose underpinning schooling and teaching in a context of greater religious, cultural and ethnic diversity" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 60). Consequently, "penetrating questions about the moral purposes of education" have arisen (p. 60). This has resulted in "a shift from a small number of stable singularities of knowledge and belief to a fluctuating, ever changing plurality of belief systems" (p. 56). Confidences in traditional truths or universal values and previously accepted certainties have eroded. Ultimately,

> the decline of traditional moral and religious certainties, coupled with the collapse of technical and scientific ones, has been responsible within many schools for widespread quests for missions, visions and senses of 'wholeness' in the form of whole school curriculum development and whole school change. (p. 61)

The search for self and group identity is paramount. Within this environment, leaders and policy setters of ECS must work to provide a dynamic Christian education that oftentimes contradicts the very society in which we live. These fast-paced changes must be realized and addressed.

In this ever-changing milieu there is less security and less stability of character. Hargreaves (1994) identifies rapid changes in technology, communication and decision-making processes. Even unchangeable boundaries are now in flux along with changing colleagues and leaders; roles are blurred, loyalties and commitments change and even immovable structures are moving. These changes affect people who begin to seek self-actualization, self-development and self-expression as important life goals. Loyalty is now based on the rewards one can achieve and a particular lifestyle that may be offered. School structures and memberships change and educational institutions adopt school based financing, school-based self-development and self-management to cope with the changing times (p. 66). Concurrently, people discover that the self is changing, becoming more uncertain, vulnerable and possibly socially withdrawn. At this point, "self development can easily degenerate into self-indulgence" (p. 68). Delusions of omnipotence can overshadow politically naïve and narcissistic individuals.

In a post-modern world, teachers, administrators and school board members are faced with challenges from within and without the education system. Paradoxically, to remain steadfast and change with the times are tall orders. However, teachers are often the central figures called to task in the educational arena. Hargreaves (1994) advocates that, "moral frameworks and a keen awareness of (as well as a willingness to engage with) the micropolitical realities of schooling are essential if the teacher's self is to be a genuinely empowered self" (p. 74). The challenge for teachers is to be "users of and innovators with technology" while being "moral guardians against its most superficial and trivializing effects" (p. 76). To interact effectively with technology but not be consumed by it is a challenge for all teachers.

Ultimately, a fast-paced society compresses time and space. Technological leaps "make communication instantaneous, distance irrelevant and time one of the most precious commodities on earth" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 81). While most things have speeded up in the name of progress and success, the quality of personal and working lives seems to be decreasing. Intolerable overload, premature burnout and loss of purpose and direction are huge sacrifices for increased efficiency. Nevertheless, Christian educators, as participants in society, must educate and live in ways that accept and use the positive aspects of change. At the same time, they must guard against and refute those facets of the post-modern world that would destroy their commitment to and practice of Christian education.

Clearly, discussions will continue. The Christian school community will need to deliberate and intentionally act to deal with inevitable change. One respondent attempted to explain these confusions and put into perspective the situation facing ECS presently. He said,

> Institutions don't change quickly. Churches don't change quickly. Educational systems don't change quickly. And, reality is, I think, that we are an institution that has a double interest. By and large we are a Christian institution associated with the Christian Reformed Church, both a school and a religious institution. We are a school to educate in a Christian way. You don't change a tanker or a battleship's course very easily and I think that is a challenge.

To stay with tradition or to change is the question. To oversee the vision and mission statements there needs to be a gatekeeper; that remains the Edmonton Christian School Board of elected parent volunteers. Working closely with school administration, teachers, parents and other community members, they are responsible for charting the course in these ever-changing times. It is not an easy task.

Again, I suggest, that tradition and change are important for ECS. Change is necessary and tradition is important. Tradition gives stability and keeps a group of people grounded in a community. Sittser (2000) proposes the advantages to maintaining traditions, especially in our rapidly changing society where people are becoming more isolated from one another. Tradition helps everyone know who he or she is and what God expects of people. Sittser tells the story of a young woman whose journey to faith was difficult and challenging. When she finally found her way to faith through the influence of a particular church and a community of people, she wanted her son to grow up in this same environment. Thus, like many other parents, she made him attend. According to this mother her reasons were simple:

> The main reason is that I want to give him what I found in the world, which is to say a path and a little light to see by. Most of the people I know who have what I want – which is to say, purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, joy – are people with a deep sense of spirituality. They are people in community, who pray, or practice their faith.... They follow a brighter light than the glimmer of their own candle; they are part of something beautiful. (pp. 46-47)

This mother wanted the traditions of a stable Christian community instilled in her child. In many ways participants in my study -- the supporters of ECS share this same desire. They do not want to lose the tradition and heritage that has been established. They want their children to find their way to faith in Jesus, the light of the world.

But, similar to every traditional community, there are disadvantages. Sometimes people become intolerant of others and élitism develops. Community members feel stifled to conform or be ostracized. New, and maybe better, ways of doing things are instantly rejected because things have always been done a certain way. Jesus loudly criticized members of the Jewish church of the New Testament when their laws and rituals became more important than the intent of the Gospel. Cliquishness and pride, arrogance and selfishness can become terrible attitudes and practices that eventually destroy the very community people hoped to preserve. Tradition is needed because it provides stability and a centre focus. However, change is inevitable and must be considered, evaluated and wisely embraced.

Undoubtedly Christian teachers influence Christian education. They are moulders and shapers of Christian education within the school. For the most part the school environment and the context within which students learn is a context greatly influenced by the teachers. However, Eisner (1990) claims that recent data about the educational scene suggest, "A student's experience is shaped not only by the explicit curriculum, but by the kind of place any particular school is." However, the determination as to what kind of place a school becomes is not just in the hands of the teachers but also the responsibility of the governing body. Eisner proposes that the school context "is organized, by the way the teachers' roles are defined, by the way students are rewarded, and by the priorities that the school sets." (p. 524). A school structure influences what students learn in school.

Within the school structure, Eisner (1990) suggests various factors that strongly influence teaching and student learning. For many years curriculum stability has existed; specific subjects such as science, math, social studies and language arts are routinely taught. These traditions are hard to change, even with the advent of new areas of learning such as computer technology. Textbooks, also, are "designed to take no risks, and they strive to alienate no one" (p. 525). Within these texts the curriculum content is formed and the way students encounter that content is defined and prescribed. It is all developed in such a way as to seem neutral, but neutrality is unachievable.

Finally, Eisner (1990) claims teachers or administrators cannot ignore standardized testing. It seems that accountability of teachers and students assures that common expectations are met. In some situations, to deviate from the content to be covered constitutes a practical and professional hazard (p. 525). Eisner goes on to ask why society seems to require such security -- in school structures, textbooks, curriculum content and standardized testing -- "on matters that beg for interpretation for consideration of context, for flexibility and most of all for judgment" (p. 525). The greater worry, he advocates, should be "the national fear of exercising judgment, coupled with our political apathy" (p. 525). Ultimately, he suggests that the lack of consensus on what should be taught keeps educators silent; we then have a symphony rather than a cacophony of sound.

Christian educators may not, however, stay silent. It is imperative that Christian teachers actively, critically and intelligently reform the curriculum. They are required to not only understand and teach the knowledge and skills of the prescribed curriculum but also re-define and conceptualize anew the prescribed context within a Christian perspective. The context of all learning must be structured or cemented in the knowledge and understanding that the world and everything in it belongs to God. The pedagogy by which the knowledge and skills are presented to the child for learning must be enveloped within the perspective that each child is a unique creation of God with his or her own learning styles, aptitudes, backgrounds and beliefs. Evaluation needs to embrace an understanding of the whole child, not just academic achievement. Textbooks, materials or resources should be interpreted in the light of God's rule for all creation. Ideally, these practices of the Christian teacher should lead to wholeness, an understanding in the child that the ideologies of education are practical for daily living while founded on the principles of the Christian faith. The integration of a Christian perspective into life and learning is not an easy task. Clearly these Christian educators, undertaking this task and working within a prescribed school structure, can be called "transformative intellectuals."

As many ECS respondents indicated in my study, our society is so rapidly changing; nothing stays the same. They believe the community of ECS has much to offer others seeking Christian education beyond CRC walls. This does not mean the community needs to lose its traditions but guard against intolerance and cliquishness. The strength of ECS is in the integration of a Christian perspective into learning for life. This integration must occur in a context where educators are not isolated from the impact of societal changes but embrace these inevitable forces while thoughtfully and critically evaluating their impact on the students and other community members. In the light of these reflections Christian educators must seek creative and Godly ways to re-focus attention on the Lord of all life and Christian learning. It is time for the community, as a whole, to consider ways to maintain the strengths and extend the benefits to other Christians.

Again, the task is not easy; change comes slowly. But, dialogue and honest discussion with other Christian people will extend the Christian education experience. It will challenge and refresh those who have been engaged in Christian education for years. As one student observed, regarding this issue, "We will all grow to be better Christians and, most of all, God will be honoured."

Academics at Edmonton Christian School

The very basis of education, in the minds of many people, is assumed to be academic learning. According to my research, academic education was considered to be of high quality at ECS. However, the limitation of education to the acquisition of knowledge or skills in a specific topic or subject area is a gross injustice to what real education should be about. Throughout the study, there was never a doubt that educational learning about the world and life in the world was important. But, even more importantly, education was about life; this is an activity whereby one learns about the world, how to live in the world and with other people in a community. From a Christian point of view, Christian education does this by integrating a Christian perspective into education.

A Christian educator, Van Brummelen (1994) reminds Christian educators, "persons move through different developmental stages as they mature" (p. 187). Van Brummelen proposes, "the development at each state continues to exert an influence over the person's whole life span" (p. 188). In referring to a number of psychologists, educators and learning theorists, it is clear that these developmental phases have implications for learning.

While Erikson (1963) gives a psychosocial understanding of child development, Piaget (1932) speaks more about child development in terms of rational thought processes. Piaget's categories of moral child development -- preoperational, concrete operational and formal operations -- are helpful in understanding the thinking processes of children. Egan (1988, 1990) discusses the developmental process in terms of "layers of understanding:" primary, romantic and philosophic understandings. The concept of "layers" rather than "stages" seems quite useful to me since there is the connotation that understandings accumulate and are piled on top of one another. The new understanding does not necessarily replace but adds to and deepens the previous understanding and insight.

Long before Egan's work, Bruner (1960) talked about a "spiral curriculum." Due to the developmental layers or stages in the maturity of children, curriculum must repetitively present the basic ideas that lie at the heart of all studies in progressively more complex forms. As a curriculum develops throughout the grades, there should be a re-visitation "of these basic ideas, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them" (p. 13). Whereas fourth grade children can understand the idea of tragedy and the basic human condition portrayed in myths, they cannot yet put these thoughts into formal language or manipulate them as many adults can. Bruner suggests that intellectual activity at all levels is the same; it just differs in degree (p. 14).

Clearly some teachers are better and more comfortable teaching students at a specific grade level; these teachers are more easily able to relate to the developmental characteristics of these students and adjust their teaching styles to fit the student. A Christian teacher must take note of these educational discoveries and also consider the individual student. Not only must a teacher consider developmental stages of students, but personal teaching style and the students' learning styles, as well. Many factors contribute to making the educational environment successful for both teacher and student.

When I reflect on these patterns or characteristics identified with certain developmental stages in children, I am bombarded with questions. In an attempt to understand participant responses regarding the satisfaction level of education being transmitted to students I noticed a discrepancy between the accepted and positive Christian education experienced in the primary and intermediate grades and the more negative, heavily critiqued Christian education seemingly evident in the junior high and senior high grades. Respondents whose children were in younger grades were undoubtedly more pleased with the Christian teachers and more positive about the Christian influence evident in the talk and behaviour of their children. Thus, I began to ask: Are teachers truly more incompetent at the higher grades? Are students so much more difficult to handle? Is there a developmental explanation? Are teenagers, in any context, more difficult to handle? Are parents struggling more with their own older children? Do they see a greater discrepancy between their primary aged children and senior aged children, so that they assume that the educational system is at fault?

With personal experience teaching in divisions one, two and three, I can attest that there are clearly differences in the students at these divisions. At every grade level, teachers face unique challenges to educating students. In general, younger children are more open to being taught; schooling has just begun and they bring bright eyes, wide smiles and willing minds. There appears to be an eagerness to learn, a curiosity that has not been squelched or moulded to fit a specific style. Family and teachers are still important in their lives. Division two students are more excited and capable of getting into more detailed studies. They especially love to work with friends; peers are becoming important but teachers still have hero status. Students in division one and two just seem more interested and motivated by school.

By the time students reach junior high, schooling is a way of life. Teachers are less important but generally represent some kind of authority; all authority is carefully scrutinized and usually challenged. Relationships are essential. A teacher who builds rapport with a junior or senior student goes a long way in helping that student learn. Peer relationships are the most important thing in their world; socializing is their primary task. Finally, in senior high, students begin to feel they have some independence, but not enough; they seek freedom to choose everything and anything. At the same time, these students begin to feel the pressure of choosing post-secondary learning or a career. They recognize the need for authority, but still don't like it. They like to "sow their wild oats" before settling down. The transition from childhood to adulthood is not necessarily a smooth one.

Clearly, changes bombard the child from infancy to adulthood. As they mature, they change; life, education, relationships and spirituality take on much more complex dimensions. It is thus reasonable to assume that Christian education, affecting all areas of their life, receives its greatest challenge, as the child grows older. According to Bibby and Posterski (1992), who have done several studies on teen trends, the teenage years are complex, confusing and often frustrating at the best of times. Throw in expectations with Christian education and life becomes even more challenging. The nature and behaviour of adolescents learning to live with their hormones makes a comparison to a division one or two student almost impossible. To identify anything seen as Christian at division three or four, is possibly a blessing.

Junior high and senior high teachers are, in fact, quite challenged at these levels. They need to be able to put their own faith on the line, open honest discussions with students and struggle with the students to confront the harsh realities of adolescence. Brave educators they are! And, to attempt to promote, encourage and nurture a Christian worldview and lifestyle – they have a most difficult task. The criticisms levied at this age level are far more severe and frequent than the other divisions. I do not surmise that junior high and senior high teachers are less competent, but that their ultimate challenge is greater. On-going dialogue and constant open communication with the parents are vital actions to ensuring understanding, consistency and hopefully a Christian perspective that is translated into education for life and learning.

Practical experience suggests that the establishment of healthy relationships with junior high and senior high students, coupled with the development of strong work habits, are vital in providing a framework for learning to occur. The need for students to feel valued is extremely important. Bruner (1982) suggests that there is a direct co-relation between the perceived atmosphere in a school and the effort that students expend to contribute or participate in their learning. Bruner speaks of a study done by Michael Rutter, a British child psychiatrist, who discovered that "where the school shows that it cares, the students care" (p. 58). Caring, by the student definition, was evident in better attendance, better behaviour and higher academic achievement. A caring school environment was defined as one that makes kids "work hard and learn" (p. 59). These schools believed in the importance of academic success, showed confidence in the students' ability to succeed, gave students responsibility, assigned homework, made sure they did it and got teachers in class on time and ready to teach. It meant teachers caring for students and together they formed a partnership, an understanding of what was important. All these actions on the part of the school personnel translated into the student getting the message that he or she was important and, therefore, education was important in order for personal success.

This is not to say that education, or Christian education, is easy for anyone. Learning a Christian worldview is complex; appropriating it to our lives is an on-going struggle. God-learning and God-living is a daily challenge.

Reflections on my Practice of Teaching

I am continually struck by the tension I feel between the different worldviews obvious in the opinions and comments of parents, teachers and students. Some participants were extremely content with the Christian education, as they perceived it to be, reformed in nature. On the other hand, others sought a more visible, tangible and personal connection of their perspective to their heart. They used phrases like "a personal relationship with Jesus Christ" and "making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ."

These parents and teachers often expressed a desire to see and hear of more "conversions" or "leading children to the Lord." This perspective and language is familiar to me; it is a part of my past that seems to haunt or tease my sense of what it means to be Christian and to be a Christian teacher. I taught in previous Christian schools that emphasized this concept of Christian education; Christian education was about "conversion." At that time, I was ready for a change in focus, not to neglect or set aside this aspect of Christian education, but to define my faith and the practice of Christian education in a different way.

Now, I find myself reflecting on how I have changed. This terminology is somewhat foreign to my daily vocabulary and even makes me cringe a little when I hear it. Old patterns and meanings impose a preconceived understanding of other religious paraphernalia into my consciousness. I tend to reject most of it, not as unchristian, but as a simplification of my present faith. However, I recognize the inherent value and probably very necessary component of faith and personal relationships that these parents seek to find evident in the faith development of their children. I desire to encourage students toward a personal relationship with Christ; but not in the manner to which I think a few parents want. I have often said that, if I could take all the good in both worldviews (according to me, of course) and put them together into one school, I would have my version of the perfect school. But, the differing Christian worldviews, of which I am most familiar, do not easily come together into a perfect balance: one seems to emphasize law and the other grace. Both have advantages and disadvantages, to some extent, but they are both valuable.

The survey results cause me to assess my own teaching. In analysing these surveys I am confronted with my own struggles to be a better Christian teacher. When I hear a critique I can't help but make it my own. This can be disheartening but it is always necessary to reflect back to the community aspect of education. Together we educate these children, not just one teacher or teachers, alone. Parents, other adults and families contribute to the education of all children. We are not islands unto ourselves; we do not do the work alone. Thus, we cannot take the credit or the blame alone.

Some parents, I believe, accurately identified increasing changes in home situations and differing Christian worldviews that are becoming more obvious in the school. This, of course, affects us all. No longer is there one view, but many views. For some parents this presents a challenge to maintain their own standards in the light of what they perceive is the watered-down Gospel. Other parents perceive this new insight as a "breath of fresh air" since it infuses new life and energy. To stagnate is to die. To rethink and restate our faith is to live it again and make it real. This struggle is constant. Do we do things because it is the way it has always been done? Or, do we remain constant because it is easier, and we are too lazy to struggle? Or, do we resist change because we are over-worked and do not have the time or energy to constantly re-look at our practice?

The struggle to find balance is constant. I want to hold to traditions that I perceive are Christian and true. I also desire to include, revise or change practices that have become stagnant. I want to continue to grapple with the issues of law and grace, maintaining a Christian worldview but rethinking my attitude. I want to struggle with students, teachers and parents and to hear again personal stories of faith. Somehow these personal reflections make theoretical discussions seem minor and insignificant; the practical, daily and very real personal expression of faith is clearly more meaningful.

Initially, I felt discouraged by the simplicity of some student comments and even some parent comments. However, I realize that they are at various stages in their life journey and their faith development. Students are young and just beginning. How different would my responses have been at that age? I am glad I considered the perceptions of parents, teachers and students in the study; together this gives a greater perspective on the whole picture. Parents and teachers are the proponents of Christian education, believing that this is best for students. Students are living in this education system now and someday will reflect on the value, or lack of value, of the Christian education they receive. At this point in time, regardless of the many imperfections and in spite of numerous suggestions for change and the recognition of features that hinder ECS from being a Christian school, parents continue to send their children to ECS and continue to advocate for Christian education. After all, the reminder that we are all human came from the mouths of the students; we are allowed to make mistakes and we will make mistakes. Our children and students are learning something; we need to remind ourselves of this more often.

At the root of all Christian education is the belief that God is, that all belongs to God, is from God and will go back to God. Christians live our lives in this knowledge, a knowledge we want to instil in our children. Personally, these are my beliefs, also. I identify my own strengths and celebrate them. At the same time, I appreciated the specific labelling of those features that hinder the effectiveness of Christian education at ECS. Here, too, I recognize the truth and concerns of many situations mentioned. Being aware of these dissatisfactions goes a long way to addressing these concerns. Clearly, sincere and regular communication is vital. Dialogue and debates about "hot" issues are avenues for community members to express their views, be heard and work towards a mutual compromise, while always keeping in mind the vision and mission statements as the guiding, foundational structure of the school.

My response to this study is not limited to this paper or to work with students in my own classroom. My goal is to respond at a teacher and community level also. As a teacher and community member, I have many opportunities to voice my thoughts. I can encourage the various voices evident within my research to speak again and to express their opinions. The summary and public awareness of these results will, hopefully, begin that process.

Reflections on Implications for Edmonton Christian School

Being a part of the ECS community I easily identify with the many compliments and concerns expressed by the variety of parents, teachers and students throughout this study. I realize that this wealth of information is a real part of what it means to be a member of this community and to teach within this community. Participants in this study identified three major themes that contribute greatly to making ECS a Christian school

(1) the integration of the Christian perspective,

(2) the Christian teachers and the Christian community, and

(3) the relationships developed therein.

In considering the results of the research I believe that members of ECS should celebrate the great things that are happening. There clearly is a passion for Christian education that is recognized in the foundational statements of the school and in the commitment and desire of parents, teachers and students to make this a better place of

Christian education. An integration of the Christian perspective into all of life and learning seems to be a veritable strength. Obviously this should continue to be supported, encouraged and celebrated.

The Edmonton Christian School community is one built on strong traditions. There have been many faithful members and supporters who have worked hard to establish this school as a good place of Christian education. Without a doubt, Christian living is much more difficult to achieve than Christian talk. Toward this end, community members at ECS need to enter into discussions and revisit the notion of community and what it means to live together in respect for each other, while truly welcoming other Christians to the existing community.

Understandably, Christian teachers were identified as vital to Christian education at ECS. Many parents and students recognized the work and passion of the teachers for Christian education. Numerous parent responses validate that Christian education is happening at the school. It is clear that the teachers feel called to this job, this school and this goal of educating students in Christian education. This is a passion! This passion is for God who is the ruler of all life. Thus, the teachers keep struggling toward the goal of an improved and even better practice in Christian education. In doing so, they seem to be succeeding. The school continues to grow. Christian education is happening.

Nevertheless, some concerns and challenges directly relate to the teachers. I wonder about the means of resolving some obvious conflicts and causing change that will bring greater information or satisfaction to the teachers. Possibly with time there will again be stability and confidence in the governance structure. All members of the community need a voice. Ways must be created and opportunities given whereby parents, teachers and students can be heard. Walking the talk must be practised in acknowledging and celebrating individual differences. Open discussions and communication must allow community members to embrace each other's needs and work to find peaceful, satisfactory solutions.

A close look at the overall research results has led me to conclude that there are, indeed, challenges at Edmonton Christian School, in spite of the many good things happening there. Many of these struggles are community based, living out the Christian faith and walking the talk. Christian education is a work in progress. Growth is occurring. We grow, work and learn together. After all is said and done, this is what Christian education is really all about, not having achieved the prize or yet won the race but striving toward the goal. For Christian leaders of the future, it would seem that Christian education at Edmonton Christian School must remain a strong force: integrating the Christian perspective into all of learning and life, communicating with and nurturing the Christian teachers while embracing diversity in Christian perspectives and striving for an even stronger community of faith. Truly then God-learning and God-living will be at its best.

CHAPTER 8

TOWARD CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study I searched for personal answers as to what parents, staff and students at Edmonton Christian School perceived as features that make this school a Christian School. In so doing, I hoped to discover various worldviews and to reflect upon my personal response to the issues predominant in Christian education: What is a Christian education? What does it mean to be a Christian teacher and to teach in a Christian environment? What does it mean to teach Christianly? Ultimately, I wanted to understand the importance of continuing the struggle for Christian education.

Christian Education at Edmonton Christian School

Parents, teachers and students at Edmonton Christian School stated clearly that, for them, Christian education is mostly about:

(1) integrating the Christian perspective into life and learning,
(2) Christian teachers modeling the faith ,
(3) a Christian community that learns to live their faith, and
(4) a leadership/governance paradigm whose policies and personnel are distinctly Christian in word and action.

Christian education is believed to be most effective when these criteria are in place. Essentially, Christian education must be education that reflects a Biblical/Christian foundation that is more than just Christian teachers teaching. Somehow, Christian teachers must also teach Christianly.

Results of the study indicate that parents, teachers and students perceive Edmonton Christian School does best at integrating the Christian perspective into life and learning and having Christian teachers who model the faith. The greatest difficulty experienced in Christian education at Edmonton Christian School seems to be the ability to live in community in ways that show unity between words and actions. There appears to be some discrepancy between the desire to live Christ-like, as reiterated in the vision and mission statements, and the ability to do so. According to Webber (1979) this dilemma is not unusual; these are two conflicting influences in the life of most Christians. Within this dilemma Christians experience the tension, the pull "between doing the will of God and not doing the will of God, moving toward God and moving away from God" (p. 45). It seems that this tension will remain the struggle of Christians and is the struggle of Christians within the Christian community at Edmonton Christian School.

Future Considerations for Christian Education at ECS

In conducting this study I anticipated feedback on Christian integration of curriculum and faith, Christian teachers as role models and the community as a place where the practice of Christian living occurs. However, in reflecting upon various criteria for a Christian school, I had not considered the significance of the governance structure. With the interpretation of these study results, further analysis and personal reflection, I now believe that the organizational structure of a Christian school may, indeed, be an important factor in the success of Christian education. Christian teachers must teach Christianly. And, this can only be accomplished if Christian educators are able to operate within a Christian leadership model, whereby the school is operated in such a way as to facilitate true Christian education.

Besides a curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation model that need to be uniquely Christian, Hull (1993; 2000) advocates for Christian structure, an organizational structure that is distinctively Christian. Hull (2000) proposes a picture of what that structure might look like if Christian schools are to be different. He suggests that "both the philosophy and school model of the public school" need to change and "a biblically grounded model of education" is required. In order to accomplish this a "better understanding of the faith/learning relationship" must occur with "a grass roots development of the model." According to Hull, success will be achieved when there are in place "Biblically based alternatives in educational goals, student evaluation, teaching methodology, curriculum content, and structure of the learning situation." And, finally, Hull suggests that "overconfidence in transformational rhetoric," and "underestimating the strength of obstacles" are in fact the hindrances to these required changes (p. 21). Considering the concerns of some stakeholders, regarding the governance structure at Edmonton Christian School, I would suggest that a future study, reflection and discussion be focused in this area. Where does Edmonton Christian School fit in this equation? How does the union of the Christian school with Edmonton Public School affect the Christian school's ability to possibly determine their own unique governance structure that supports Christian education? How does one develop a leadership/governance paradigm whose policies and personnel are distinctly Christian in word and action? These are questions that remain to be answered or, more importantly, these are the questions that require discussion within the community of Edmonton Christian School. It seems to me that the structure or governance model of Christian education is foundational to the success of Christian education.

Keeping Faith:
Christian Education as Tradition and Transformation

Every culture and community is unique. The struggle for self-identity is an issue of distinctiveness. How am I different than you? Who am I in relation to you? Who am I in relation to the world? Embracing difference is what Edmonton Christian School is about. In essence, Christian school supporters want to be different; they want to be unique with a distinctive Christian perspective. However, even within this one school there is disagreement about what to emphasize and on what to focus.

Some respondents supported Christian education with an emphasis on the integration of faith with academic learning while others wished to emphasize the faith development of the child in terms of a personal, spiritual growth. In other circumstances some parents celebrated and encouraged even greater emphases on academic achievement while others would like to see less emphasis on academics and more celebration of the whole child with talents and skills that are not necessarily academic-based. Although these examples are not necessarily contradictory in nature, they do present varying areas of focus. This search for identity is an interaction between personal philosophies and group understandings. To truly understand Christian education one must examine the interplay between the community as a whole and the vision of the individual members.

Does Edmonton Christian School accomplish this goal of difference? After numerous readings, analysis of various studies, engagement in discussions with colleagues, and interpretation and reflection on this research data, it is obvious that there are complex issues of distinctiveness in Christian education. The warnings and predictions of Burtcheall (1998) are frightening. In his research many Christian education institutions have gradually lost their Christian distinctiveness. Education may continue to happen but these once-Christian places educate without reference to, understanding of or practice of a Biblical perspective. Van Brummelen (2000) also spoke of these damning results obvious in Canada and the Netherlands. He concluded that, "in short, the long-term history of what happens to Christian education is depressing" (p. 26). Nevertheless, it seems to me that the desire and search for a better Christian education would be different depending on what Christian education means for a particular school, community and culture. Articulating the goals and vision of Christian education is important; putting these values into practice is essential if Edmonton Christian School is to thrive and, ultimately, survive.

As a result of this study, I firmly believe that being a Christian school is more an assertion of a future dream or a goal to work toward than a present fulfillment. True Christian education is about working toward Christian education. In dreaming of difference, we already accomplish it. In the refusal to accept all of secular society's values, we begin to strive toward Christian education. It is obvious that the completion of this "working toward" can never be fully achieved. Working with people, living, learning and growing toward Christ are always changing events. We cannot achieve it; we can only be guided toward it. However, the failure to fully achieve should not deter Christian educators from working toward the goal.

Perhaps we are missing the point. Instead of noting the failure to perfectly accomplish this goal of Christian education, perhaps we need to re-examine the goal. Is the goal to achieve difference or is the goal to attempt to create difference in the form of Christian education?

In a communication with D.V. House (personal communication, April 17, 2002) he suggested that Christian education is really about celebrating difference. Christian education is about "making difference." Christian education is about "creating difference and nourishing difference." To be distinctive, Christian education must present an obvious difference. According to House "Education… is not a marketplace of ideas… it is self-conscious, intentional effort at community identity formation. At least in terms of intention, if not always achieved, the Christian school aims to help make a certain kind of human being and a certain kind of human community." These differences evident in the ECS community are part of a "difference-making project." To be different, to offer Christian education, is to do so with a specific intention reflected in goals, curriculum, educational philosophies and a vision of life that claims to place God at the center of all life. This is Christian education.

In considering the present experience of Edmonton Christian School, the future path is undetermined. There are many unknowns and numerous fears. Joining Edmonton Public School Board as an alternative school was a huge unknown and remains an unproven relationship. Many community members fear this union, while others celebrate it. In the course of this journey there are people who, although they are going in the same basic direction, will disagree on the path. The steps and the perspectives vary. What one sees as a reason for celebration another sees as a simplification of the faith. Nevertheless, opposing and contradictory points of view are necessary for Christian education to thrive; they keep us talking, thinking, reflecting and changing.

So much of what I have received as information in this study is only a small chunk of the whole that makes up life at Edmonton Christian School, past and present. Although I have collected much information in the form of surveys and interviews, my study will forever remain incomplete. This is, and always will be, a dynamic process. Perceptions change. From the fear of hiring practices to the confusion of specific discipline problems, one recognizes that all responses are situated in time and place. As a recent addition to Edmonton Public School, changes are constant for ECS. Some do not want to see change because they are afraid. What will happen to our school? What will change do to our school? Where will we be five years from now? Others advocate for change because they are afraid that the school will otherwise die a gradual death. And, for some community members, resistance to ECS becoming a part of Edmonton Public School may not simply be fear of change on the part of some society members, but the desire for a different vision. These visionaries might declare a hope that Christian education at ECS could go far beyond what might be accomplished within Edmonton Public School. Recognizing that the task is large, one can only focus on a small part of the journey at one time. Clearly, Christian education is an ever changing, ongoing process.

It is only reasonable to understand and realize that Christian education in a day-school context is a stepping-stone to the rest of a student's life. When students graduate, leave home and find their own way in the world, parents need to let go. Students will continue to grow and change. Beversluis (1971) has captured the desire of many parents at ECS -- that their children will graduate from the Christian school as thoughtful and responsible people, equipped to fit into our culture, to bring necessary change to our society, and learning to serve others while working toward bringing all of our life and the world under the rule of Christ (p. 29). This is making difference, forming a self-identity.

In a nutshell this is the (Reformed) Christian worldview. It is the present basis of Christian education for most parents, teachers and students at ECS. But, will it remain so? It was interesting to see Van Brummelen (2000), after much discussion of his eleven specific features of what to look for in a Christian school, take time to consider the assumption that a school's constitution must be distinctively reformed. I agree with Van Brummelen that a church creedal statement does not need to be a central tenet of a school constitution in order for the school to be distinctively Christian. However, his critical components recommended for a Christian school, referred to in great detail in chapter 2 of this thesis, "are necessary since they focus much more specifically on what happens in the classroom than do our creedal standards" (p. 28). Over the past few years ECS has opened its doors to a variety of Christian worldviews. At Edmonton Christian School the hope and desire of many people is that the Reformed worldview will remain dominant. However, if real discussions about theory, practice and expectations of Christian education are to occur with other Christians of slightly differing Christian beliefs, there will be change.

Christian education at Edmonton Christian School only begins the formation of a Christian worldview. As I analyzed the student's surveys, I was struck by how predictable their responses appeared. Students seemed to re-iterate their parents' views and concerns. As children, they depend on their parents, even for the way they think. Upon a more careful consideration, I realize this would be no different in any context. Children incorporate and learn to accept as their worldview the worldview to which they are exposed. Therefore, as a Christian educator and parent, I am struck by the realization that Christian education is vitally important. If parents and a Christian community want the children to be exposed and, hopefully, embrace the same Christian life view, they need to educate the children accordingly. I can imagine that some people would call this indoctrination; and, it is. But, if it were not the Christian worldview, it would be another worldview. Children cannot escape assuming or being immersed in a worldview. There is no neutral ground. Thus, Christians take what they believe and attempt to teach it to their children. It is a compelling, purposeful response to personal belief. Christians pass on, deliberately and intentionally, a worldview to their children. But, still, these children grow into adults with a will and critical sense that can never be extinguished. At some point they assume, reject, or accommodate this view to their own experience, thoughts, and life. This is what it means to become a mature adult.

Christian education is intended to start them on a pathway, to create an identity and give them a Christian perspective. Hopefully, these tools will enable children to negotiate their way through a milieu of numerous belief systems, even the diversity of Christian belief systems -- to discover for themselves the living Christ. Just as my early childhood, Christian worldview has changed, and I believe for the better, so will the journey of faith for my students.

To actually see growth happening, to understand the full purpose and accomplishment of Christian education right now, is a very difficult thing. That is why Christian parents, educators and community supporters have never achieved the end in Christian education, but are always striving toward a better Christian education. Does that mean Christian education was not good in the past? No! Do Christian parents and educators need to worry about the future? No! By keeping their vision and revising it when necessary, by remaining faithful themselves and ensuring that the leadership is faithful to desiring God's way in the world, Edmonton Christian School will continue to grow as a Christian School and to educate children to joyful service to God, in the world and to each other.

Schools are complex places. But, Christian schools have the added complexity of offering a deliberate and intentional distinction. The parents and community of Edmonton Christian School see the keeping of their Christian faith to be of utmost importance. This Christian community has a vision of life that is centred in their faith in God. This mission and vision must be passed on to their children. Life is service to God and neighbour and the created world. Edmonton Christian School is one part in the process of passing on this vision of renewal and transformation, toward justice and peace for all human beings. Christian education is intended to teach, model and guide children toward achieving that transformation. To keep faith with their children Christian parents show their children what they've found. They tell them what they know. They teach them to love justice. Christian parents give their children the life of faith they know in order that their children may grow to know more about life in God and to learn how to love even better than the parents do themselves.

In essence, as a Christian community, Edmonton Christian School works toward a better practice of Christian education. The Christian school community has not yet achieved the dream of a flawless Christian school with perfect Christian teachers offering the most excellent Christian education. Nevertheless, this Christian community strives to keep faith by providing a Christian education that recognizes tradition and seeks transformation.

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APPENDIX A

MISSION STATEMENT OF EDMONTON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Believing Jesus is Lord over all of life Edmonton Christian School educates students for joyful and responsible service to God and society.

THE EDMONTON SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF FAITH

We believe that Edmonton Christian School must provide an education that is shaped by a faith rooted in Scripture. Scripture, the divinely inspired and authoritative word of God, provides insight for every dimension of life. Christian education, therefore, tells us how to understand ourselves in relationship to God, to others, and to the natural world.

We believe that God, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) created and continues to maintain the entire universe. Early on, our first parents rebelled against God. Since then all human lives have been twisted, impaired, and marked by the suffering that stems from this broken relationship. The heart of the Bible's message, and the reason we understand the gospel to be such good news, is the revelation that God has not abandoned the creation, but has determined to set things right!

We believe the redemptive intent of God finds its centre in the life and work of Jesus Christ. In the person of Jesus, God executes a just punishment against the sin of humankind, and graciously offers forgiveness to all. Because he suffered and died, Jesus Christ reconciles sinful people to their Creator, and he fulfils God's promise to restore the whole creation. By his resurrection and ascension to his heavenly throne, Jesus Christ is both Saviour and Lord of the universe.

We believe this world and all who live in it belong to God. Although our world remains troubled and flawed, the work and victory of Jesus give us hope. We eagerly wait for the day when Jesus Christ returns and is publicly acknowledged as Lord of all. On that day, the redemptive purposes of God will be complete. God will erase every vestige of sin and suffering. Until that day arrives, the Holy Spirit of God works faith in us and inspires us to live in ways which acknowledge the truth of the good news in Jesus.

We believe that our place in God's world is one of special privilege and responsibility. Made in God's image, we human beings are called to responsible stewardship: loving others and ourselves, and developing and preserving the resources of creation. Since the entire universe is the Kingdom of our Lord; every dimension of life must be understood in relationship to Him.

We believe that formal education finds its place within this broad framework of understanding ourselves in relationship to God, to others and to the universe. We believe that children must be afforded the opportunity of learning about themselves, others, and the universe, all in relation to the God who created, who maintains, and who one day will fulfill the redemptive work begun in Jesus Christ. In order to fulfill this goal, and to fulfill our responsibility as parents, our children must have schools in which this faith perspective is integrated fully into the curriculum and is modeled by teachers who personally share its convictions.

We believe that education involves the acquisition and mastery of knowledge, and the development of a critical, discerning mind, both of which need be rooted in the framework of the Scripture's story. This will enable students to take their places in society as responsible citizens, with both academic and spiritual integrity.

(This statement is a synopsis of the faith perspective that inspired The Edmonton Society for Christian Education to establish its schools. Commitment to this statement is a prerequisite for Society membership.)

APPENDIX B

VISION STATEMENT OF EDMONTON CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

VISION-MISSION GOALS AND STRATEGIES

I. **Students**

In obedience to the Word of God as revealed in Scripture, Edmonton Christian School (ECS) students will pursue their studies inside the framework of their responsibilities to God, other people, the animal and plant kingdoms, and the physical environment.

A. Students at ECS *will acquire a core knowledge base* that includes the story of God's people from Biblical times to the present, important features of the natural world, the basic characteristics of the larger culture and the interdependence of all God's creatures.

   1. Each campus will offer a rigorous and diverse academic program to meet this goal.

B. Students at ECS *will develop their various God-given gifts and talents*.

   1. Each campus will have policies and programs that meet this goal.

C. ECS students *will experience the invitation* to i) enter into a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ and ii) make informed Christian choices.

   1. Each campus will offer programs and activities designed to meet this goal.

D. The character and behavior of students at ECS *will reflect Christian values*.

   1. Each campus will develop policies and programs that affirm our Christian community's ethical standards.

E. Students at ECS *will develop a sense of social responsibility* guided by the principle that they must participate in the world without succumbing to worldly ways.

   1. Each campus will provide opportunities for students to serve the needs of a broken world in tangible ways.

F. ECS students *will learn to respect the human body*.

1. Each campus will promote personal physical health in its program and with its policies.
2. Each campus will have policies that outline appropriate touching and physical contact.

II. Curriculum and Programming

ECS will advocate a program based on the following convictions: i) biblical principles are relevant to all areas of study, ii) an integrated, thematic approach to learning best captures a Christian perspective on life, iii) faith directed learning leads to purposeful living, iv) curriculum guidelines must affirm the diversity, complexity and richness of God's world, v) the curriculum will follow the Alberta Education program of studies.

A. ECS will offer a program *that equips students with relevant skills and the discernment* required to practice a Christian life.

1. The Principal will monitor academic achievement and regularly share these results with the Board of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education (ESCE).
2. The Principal will keep the Board of ESCE informed about the students' ability to relate the Bible to learning and their commitment to the vision and mission of the school.

B. ECS will offer a program that acknowledges student differences.

1. Each campus will identify student needs and address them appropriately.

C. ECS *will promote a program that characterizes normal human relationships* in terms of righteousness, respect, justice and peace.

1. The Principal will demonstrate to the ESCE Board that the program and practice of each campus reflects this perspective on human society.

D. ECS *will offer a program that addresses real life problems* and encourages students to generate real products.

1. The Principal will provide the ESCE Board with an annual plan that reviews the stewardship and service foci of the school's program.

2. Teachers will provide the Principal and the Board of ESCE with rationale statements for all unit plans.

E. ECS *will make regular program revisions.*

1. Each campus will require teachers to regularly attend program development and unit planning workshops.

2. The Principal will lead teachers in an on-going development of the program.

II. Staff

Teaching staff and administration will be professional, Christian educators who understand both the history and the transformational character of its reformed vision and mission. All staff will clearly exhibit their enthusiasm, competence and commitment to educate students in this tradition of Christian education.

A. Teachers *will structure learning environments* that challenge students to integrate Christian faith and learning.

1. Each campus will foster teacher-student relationships characterized by authenticity, integrity and reconciliation.

2. Each campus will require teachers to address the needs of students and those of the world beyond the classroom.

3. Each campus will encourage students to appreciate and depend upon each other.

4. Each campus will encourage students to articulate the vision and mission of the school and to adopt it as their own creed.

5. Teachers will receive regular feedback from the Principal, colleagues and students regarding the learning environment of their classrooms.

B. Teachers *will demonstrate competency* within their subject areas.

1. Each campus will require teachers to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to offer the Alberta Education curriculum within a program that reflects the vision and mission of ECS.

2. Each campus will have policies and procedures that encourage teacher growth in program and pedagogy development.

3. The Principal will require teachers to regularly demonstrate their familiarity with new trends and issues in their areas of expertise.

4. The Principal will require teachers to illustrate the ways their teaching matches the learning styles and abilities of their students.

5. The Principal will require teachers to exhibit a love of and commitment to life-long learning.

6. Teachers will evaluate student progress with methods appropriate to vision and mission goals of ECS.

C. ECS staff will model a Christian lifestyle.

1. Each campus will encourage teachers to be Christian role models.

IV. School Atmosphere

God's peace will define an environment of community at ECS. In this community setting staff and students will feel free to share their joys and to carry the burdens of others. Positive school spirit will grow out of a rich devotional life, inspired learning and healthy socializing.

A. ECS teachers and students *will develop meaningful relationships* with each other.

1. Teachers will plan devotions that give students and teachers opportunities to pray for each other.

2. Each campus will run programs that encourage healthy peer relationships.

3. Teachers will develop healthy mentoring relationships appropriate to the age of their students.

B. ECS *will acknowledge and celebrate student success*.

1. Teachers at each campus will utilize both quantitative and qualitative forms of evaluation.

2. Procedures and policies for rewarding student achievement will recognize a diversity of abilities and gifts.

C. ECS *will celebrate important events* in the life of the school community.

1. Each campus will set aside time and resources to meet this goal.

D. ECS teachers will provide a safe environment for all students.

1. Campus policies will require zero tolerance for any kind of abuse.
2. Teachers will demonstrate the cooperative nature of their classrooms to the Principal and to parents.
3. Teachers at each campus will develop a common set of expectations for student behaviour.
4. Discipline policies at each campus will require teachers to impose consequences for inappropriate behaviour that are fair, consistent and immediate.
5. The policies of each campus will require students to speak and behave in a Christian manner.
6. Teachers will periodically review student behaviour expectations and discipline procedures with parents and students.
7. ECS teachers will consult with students in order to improve the school's atmosphere.

V. Community

The Edmonton Society for Christian Education and its Board will promote healthy community relations with all other stakeholders in Edmonton Christian School through mutual respect, effective communication, enthusiastic cooperation and commitment to this vision and mission statement.

A. The ESCE *will promote the vision and mission* of ECS

1. The Board of ESCE will encourage other community members to be conversant about the vision, goals and values of ECS.
2. Within the policy framework of the Edmonton Public School Board and in consultation with the Superintendent of EPSB (as outlined in the agreement between ESCE and EPSB), ESCE will monitor the overall direction of the ECS.

B. *Open communication and unity building* will characterize the Edmonton Society for Christian Education.

1. The ESCE Board will celebrate special events in the life of the school society and build up relations between new and old members.

2. The Board of ESCE and school administration will publicize policy changes.

3. The Board of ESCE will involve the ESCE through regular Society meetings.

C. The Principal and teachers of ECS *will involve parents* in the education of their children.

1. Each campus will require teachers to regularly discuss all aspects of their students' education with parents.

2. Each campus will provide the community with opportunities to participate in school functions.

3. Each campus will regularly communicate with the home through such vehicles as a newsletter or bulletin.

4. The school will encourage parent volunteers.

D. ESCE *will promote Christian education* in the greater Edmonton area.

1. ECS will create and maintain an alumni association.

2. ECS will promote the cause of Christian education through local churches and advertising in local media.

3. ECS will create opportunities for the public to experience Christian education through events like an annual open house and Education Week activities.

VI. ESCE Board

In consultation with ESCE membership and ECS staff, the Board will work together with the Superintendent of the Edmonton Public School Board to safeguard the integrity of the vision and mission of Edmonton Christian School.

A. The Board *will develop a set of long and short-term goals* that express the broad intentions of the vision/mission statement.

1. Goal documents will include strategies that outline accountability, mileposts and mechanisms for review.

2. The Board will regularly review its goal document.

B. The ESCE Board *will translate the mission and vision of the school into clear, consistent policies* to guide the work of administration staff, teachers and volunteers.

1. The Board will regularly review its policies and their effectiveness in fulfilling the ECS vision and mission.

2. Goal setting at all levels will have teacher and parent input.

C. The Board *will have mechanisms in place* that require accountability on the part of all employees for each area described in this document.

1. The Board will monitor the school's success in achieving the vision and mission.

D. The Board *will provide a sound financial basis* to maintain the school buildings And property, transportation, and the quality of the program.

1. A budgeting framework will exist in which revenue sources and expenditures are planned and managed in accordance with the school's vision and goals.

2. Revenue sources will be broad based, ethical and sustainable.

VII. Facilities

ECS will have facilities that enable the administration and teachers to implement the school's vision and mission.

A. ECS *will have facilities and resources* that complement and enhance the education program.

1. The ESCE Board will maintain a long-range facility plan.

2. The facilities will be attractive and conducive to learning.

3. The facilities will meet provincial safety standards.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY FOR PARENTS

What makes Edmonton Christian School a *Christian* School?

Personal Data (Parent): **Please check (√) all categories that apply to you:**

___ Parent (not a teacher) **___ Parent and Teacher**

Child(ren) in: ___ Primary ___ Intermediate ___ Junior High ___ Senior High

How long have your children been in attendance at Edmonton Christian School? __________________

Have your children ever attended another school? _________ If so, for how long? _________

To what church denomination do you affiliate? ____

How would you rate your knowledge/understanding of what Edmonton Christian School is all about?

___ excellent ___ very good ___ good ___ fair ___ poor

Parent Survey

What is the primary reason you send your children to a *Christian* school?

Are there other reasons?

What do you see as the most important feature(s) that make ECS a *Christian* school? If possible, give examples – without using specific names.

What do you see as the most important feature(s) that hinder ECS from being a more effective *Christian* school? If possible, give examples – without using specific names.

Do you believe your child/children enjoy attending this school? ____ Why or why not?

If you would be willing to share more experiences, stories, and feelings about ECS, please print your name below. I will randomly select some people for more in-depth interviews

________________________________ ***Home phone number:*** _______________

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY FOR TEACHERS

What makes Edmonton Christian School a *Christian* School?

Personal Data (Teacher): Please check (√) all categories that apply to you:

___ Teacher (not a parent with children at ECS) ___ Teacher and Parent (children at ECS)

How long have you been employed at ECS? ________________________

Which divisions have you taught in? ___ Primary ___ Intermediate ___ Junior High ___ Senior High

Have you ever been employed by another school? _______ If so, for how long? ________

To what church denomination do you affiliate? ____

How would you rate your knowledge/understanding of what ECS is all about?

___ excellent ___ very good ___ good ___ fair ___ poor

Teacher Survey

Why do you teach in a *Christian* school?

What do you see as the most important feature(s) that make ECS a *Christian* school? If possible, give examples.

What do you see as the most important feature(s) that hinder ECS from being a more effective *Christian* school? If possible, give examples.

What makes your teaching *Christian*? Give examples.

What is your greatest satisfaction related to teaching at Edmonton Christian School?

What is your greatest disappointment related to teaching at Edmonton Christian School?

If you would be willing to share more experiences, stories, and feelings about ECS, please print your name below. I will select some people for more in-depth interviews.

________________________________ ***Home phone number:*** ________________

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY FOR STUDENTS

What makes Edmonton Christian School a *Christian* School?

Student Survey

Personal Data: Please check (√) all categories that apply to you:

___ Junior High Student ___ Senior High Student

How long have you been in attendance at ECS? ____________________

Have you ever attended another school? ________ If so, for how long? __________

To what church denomination do you affiliate? ________________________________

Why do you think your parents send you to a *Christian* school?

What do you see as the most important feature(s) that make ECS a *Christian* school?

What do you see as the most important feature(s) that hinder ECS from being a more effective *Christian* school?

In what ways would you say that your teachers are *Christian* teachers?

In what ways would you say that your teachers do NOT seem like *Christian* teachers?

Would you recommend ECS to other students/families looking for a *Christian* school? ____
Why or why not?

In your experience so far, what is your most vivid memory, event, activity, or accomplishment at Edmonton Christian School?

* * * * * * * * *

DRAW...ILLUSTRATE...TELL me one or more personal (or family) incident/story/event that has shaped your overall impression of Edmonton *Christian* School. If you need more space, continue on another page and attach it to your survey.

If you would be willing to share more experiences, stories, and feelings about ECS, please print your name below. I will select some people for more in-depth, personal interviews

_________________________________ ***home phone number:*** ____________

APPENDIX F

RATING SCALE SURVEY FOR PARENTS

What makes Edmonton Christian School a *Christian* School?

Personal Data (*Parent*): Please check (√) all categories that apply to you:

___ Parent (not a teacher)   ___ Parent and Teacher

Child(ren) in: ___ Primary   ___ Intermediate   ___ Junior High   ___ Senior High

How long have your children been in attendance at Edmonton Christian School? ________________

Have your children ever attended another school? _________   If so, for how long? _________

To what church denomination do you affiliate? ________________________________

How would you rate your knowledge/understanding of what Edmonton Christian School is all about?
___ excellent   ___ very good   ___ good   ___ fair   ___ poor

Survey: Please read the cover letter carefully before beginning this survey. Each statement below should be rated from one (1) meaning "I strongly disagree" to five (5) meaning "I strongly agree". Your circled response should indicate your impressions or feelings based on your personal experience or the experience of immediate family members.

.......................(Strongly Disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (Strongly Agree).......................

Faith Integration at ECS:

	Rating
A. Students receive clear teaching from the Word of God to learn about God's activity in the world and our responsibility as God's people.	**1 2 3 4 5**
B. Students are encouraged to grow in faith, develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to share this Good News with others.	**1 2 3 4 5**
C. Students are taught critical thinking while being given opportunity to discern between good and evil and to make informed Christian choices.	**1 2 3 4 5**
D. Students are challenged to live a life of faith and joyful service to God, to their neighbours and throughout the world.	**1 2 3 4 5**
E. Staff and students are able to confront sin, encourage restoration, promote reconciliation and healing.	**1 2 3 4 5**

Comments on faith integration at ECS:

Relationships at ECS:	Rating
A. Students are provided opportunities to develop God-given gifts and talents, to accept limitations and appreciate gifts and limitations of others.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Students actively reflect Christian values in their character and behaviour as they learn to value themselves and respect their neighbour.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Staff and students share meaningful, healthy relationships characterized by Christ like attitudes of caring, honesty, reconciliation and mutual respect.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Students feel comfortable and safe in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation and mutual concern where needs are shared and joys celebrated.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Students receive discipline for the purpose of discipleship, nurturing students to live out their Christian faith in words and actions.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments on relationships at ECS:

Academics at ECS:	Rating
A. Students are nurtured and equipped to influence society and live out Christian principles of justice, love, reconciliation and peace.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Student evaluation is primarily for the purpose of fostering student growth, enabling students to reach their God-given potential.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Teachers actively engage students in real (genuine) learning environments, articulating God's action and our responsibility in the world.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Educational standards prepare students for work and learning that they will encounter later in life.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Student/teacher interactions, in halls and classrooms, show that this is a learning community that lives and works toward responsible discipleship.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments on academics at ECS:

Teachers at ECS:

	Rating
A. Teachers are active, committed Christians who model a life of faith in the school and in all areas of their life.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Teachers are active learners who seek to understand and discern the world around them while using their gifts to enhance learning for students.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Teachers demonstrate competency within their subject area with the ability to integrate the Christian perspective in teaching environments.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Teachers provide a variety of learning activities so students may respond to learning in different ways according to their individual needs or gifts.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Teachers are friendly, caring people who are easy to approach with questions, concerns or comments.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments on teachers at ECS:

* * * * * * * * *

Story Time: ...DRAW...ILLUSTRATE...TELL me one or more personal (or family) incident/story/event that has shaped your overall impression of Edmonton *Christian* School. Be specific but please don't use names. If you need more space, continue on the back of this page.

Add any other comments about ECS that you think might be relevant for this study.

APPENDIX G

RATING SCALE SURVEY FOR TEACHERS

What makes Edmonton Christian School a *Christian* School?

Personal Data **(Teacher)**: Please check (√) all categories that apply to you:

___ Teacher (not a parent with children at ECS)   ___ Teacher and Parent (children at ECS)

How long have you been employed at ECS? ________________________

Which divisions have you taught in? ___ Primary ___ Intermediate ___ Junior High ___ Senior High

Have you ever been employed by another school? _______ If so, for how long? ________

To what church denomination do you affiliate? ____

How would you rate your knowledge/understanding of what ECS is all about?

___ excellent   ___ very good   ___ good   ___ fair   ___ poor

Survey: Please read the cover letter carefully before beginning this survey. Each statement below should be rated from one (1) meaning "I strongly disagree" to five (5) meaning "I strongly agree". Your circled response should indicate your impressions or feelings based on your personal experience or the experience of immediate family members.

........................(Strongly Disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (Strongly Agree)........................

Faith Integration at ECS:

	Rating
A. Students receive clear teaching from the Word of God to learn about God's activity in the world and our responsibility as God's people.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Students are encouraged to grow in faith, develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to share this Good News with others.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Students are taught critical thinking while being given opportunity to discern between good and evil and to make informed Christian choices.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Students are challenged to live a life of faith and joyful service to God, to their neighbours and throughout the world.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Staff and students are able to confront sin, encourage restoration, promote reconciliation and healing.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments on faith integration at ECS:

Relationships at ECS:

	Rating
A. Students are provided opportunities to develop God-given gifts and talents, to accept limitations and appreciate gifts and limitations of others.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Students actively reflect Christian values in their character and behaviour as they learn to value themselves and respect their neighbour.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Staff and students share meaningful, healthy relationships characterized by Christ like attitudes of caring, honesty, reconciliation and mutual respect.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Students feel comfortable and safe in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation and mutual concern where needs are shared and joys celebrated.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Students receive discipline for the purpose of discipleship, nurturing students to live out their Christian faith in words and actions.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments on relationships at ECS:

Academics at ECS:

	Rating
A. Students are nurtured and equipped to influence society and live out Christian principles of justice, love, reconciliation and peace.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Student evaluation is primarily for the purpose of fostering student growth, enabling students to reach their God-given potential.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Teachers actively engage students in real (genuine) learning environments, articulating God's action and our responsibility in the world.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Educational standards prepare students for work and learning that they will encounter later in life.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Student/teacher interactions, in halls and classrooms, show that this is a learning community that lives and works toward responsible discipleship.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments on academics at ECS:

Teachers at ECS:

	Rating
A. Teachers are active, committed Christians who model a life of faith in the school and in all areas of their life.	1 2 3 4 5
B. Teachers are active learners who seek to understand and discern the world around them while using their gifts to enhance learning for students.	1 2 3 4 5
C. Teachers demonstrate competency within their subject area with the ability to integrate the Christian perspective in teaching environments.	1 2 3 4 5
D. Teachers provide a variety of learning activities so students may respond to learning in different ways according to their individual needs or gifts.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Teachers are friendly, caring people who are easy to approach with questions, concerns or comments.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments on teachers at ECS:

* * * * * * * * *

Story Time: ...DRAW...ILLUSTRATE...TELL me one or more personal (or family) incident/story/event that has shaped your overall impression of Edmonton *Christian* School. Be specific but please don't use names. If you need more space, continue on the back of this page.

Add any other comments about ECS that you think might be relevant for this study.